



The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

The Little Book Of Life

Alan Macmillan Orr

This is not a work of philosophy.

This is not a book for intellectuals or learned men.

This a book for every person in the world.

This is not a book for christians, muslims, buddhists or atheists.

This is a book for you,

You and I who are as one – Human

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Our words are what separates us from animals. We have the ability to communicate our thoughts and feelings clearly to another human being. Words are vital and so is how we use them. One word can change your life forever.

I **love** you
I **hate** you

Think about it

We use words so frivolously without any thought of the true meaning behind them. Together we will go behind the words, and investigate what they mean to us, how we feel when we use them, and how these words ultimately affect life as we know it.

Introduction

Welcome to the The Little Book Of Life – an A to Z collection of over 250 topics and subtopics; covering everything from anger to competition; from supermarkets to desire; from pornography to love. This book is non-linear, and there is no correct order to read it in. As you progress through each topic, you will find sarcasm; humour; practical insight; dialogues; personal stories; questions; a screenplay with you as the actors; telephone conversations; and a personal deconstruction of the human condition, chipping away at all our actions, thoughts, beliefs and traditions, to uncover the natural mind: a mind free from conditioning, ready to explore life with compassion, open to new possibilities; forever in a state of learning, living life with joy.

You may find using this book a little confusing to begin with, as there is no requirement to start at page 1 and continue to the end, but stick with it, and you may soon find yourself challenging the idea of a beginning and an ending...

I have not written this book so people can follow it blindly, or accept it as truth, and I do not hope to change the world. I just hope I can inspire those of you who may be asleep, to wake up!

When you first begin to read it, you may find yourself instantly disagreeing with something I am saying; but if you pay careful attention to your mind, you will learn to challenge all its pre-constructed arguments.

Whatever you do, do not accept anything that is written here or anywhere else, go and find out for yourselves.

Enjoy the book!

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Topics in the order they were written

[The Author's Journey](#)
[Dialogue one](#)
[Addiction 1](#)
[Addiction 2](#)
[Addiction 3](#)
[Children](#)
[Gambling](#)
[Litter](#)
[Loans](#)
[Alcohol](#)
[Alcoholism](#)
[Alcoholics Anonymous](#)
[Monarchy](#)
[Nationalism](#)
[Nature](#)
[Need](#)
[Orgasm](#)
[Revenge](#)
[Swearing](#)
[Television](#)
[Thought](#)
[Torture](#)
[Fun](#)
[Human](#)
[Freedom](#)
[Change](#)
[Animals](#)
[Criticism](#)
[Cool](#)
[Driving](#)
[Conversation](#)
[Silence](#)
[Running](#)
[Jobs 1](#)
[Jobs 2](#)
[Jobs 3](#)
[Death](#)
[Graffiti](#)
[Travel](#)
[World](#)
[Zoo](#)
[Evolution](#)
[Composting](#)
[Executions](#)
[Army](#)
[Extremism](#)
[Meaning](#)
[Listening](#)
[Sex](#)
[Massage](#)
[War](#)

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

[Meat](#)
[Law](#)
[Awareness](#)
[Death](#)
[Arguing](#)
[Boredom](#)
[Suicide](#)
[Mental Health](#)
[Fear](#)
[Drugs](#)
[Smoking](#)
[Advertising](#)
[Fashion](#)
[Focus](#)
[Tenderness](#)
[Cosmetics](#)
[Credit Cards](#)
[Marriage](#)
[Progress](#)
[Exercise](#)
[Experience](#)
[Takeaways](#)
[Fast Food](#)
[Supermarkets](#)
[Recycling](#)
[Smell](#)
[Agriculture](#)
[Waste](#)
[Water](#)
[Pornography](#)
[Prisons](#)
[Play](#)
[Punishment](#)
[Bullying](#)
[Questions](#)
[Honesty](#)
[Paper](#)
[Tax](#)
[Passion](#)
[Respect](#)
[Guilt](#)
[Giving](#)
[Crime](#)
[Information](#)
[Police](#)
[Gossip](#)
[Antibiotics](#)
[Complaining](#)
[Markets](#)
[Grief](#)
[Humour](#)
[Laziness](#)
[Past](#)

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

[Follow](#)
[Electricity](#)
[Killing](#)
[Acceptance](#)
[Charity](#)
[History](#)
[Globalisation](#)
[Technology](#)
[Tourism](#)
[Education](#)
[Knowledge](#)
[Bank](#)
[Violence](#)
[Guns](#)
[Consumerism](#)
[Flying](#)
[Core](#)
[Grooming](#)
[Christmas](#)
[Manufacturing](#)
[Memory](#)
[Meditation](#)
[Language](#)
[Suffering](#)
[Spiritual](#)
[Peace](#)
[Jealousy](#)
[Important 1](#)
[Important 2](#)
[Important 3](#)
[Cruelty](#)
[Consequences](#)
[Celebrity](#)
[Music](#)
[God](#)
[Insight](#)
[Worship](#)
[Belief](#)
[Tolerance](#)
[Success](#)
[Leader](#)
[Competition](#)
[Youth](#)
[Politeness](#)
[Order](#)
[Chaos](#)
[Embarrassment](#)
[Disarmament](#)
[Power](#)
[Politics](#)
[Health](#)
[Happiness](#)
[Conforming](#)

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

[Conditioning](#)
[Culture](#)
[Stress](#)
[Literature](#)
[Illusion](#)
[Cities](#)
[Construction](#)
[Gardens](#)
[Architecture](#)
[Home](#)
[Friendship](#)
[Community](#)
[Commitment](#)
[Confidence](#)
[Desire](#)
[Pride](#)
[Anger](#)
[Hate](#)
[Expectations](#)
[Explore](#)
[Attachment](#)
[Creativity](#)
[Relationships](#)
[Government](#)
[Religion](#)
[Brain](#)
[Consciousness](#)
[Self](#)
[Men](#)
[Groups](#)
[Control](#)
[Evil](#)
[Corporations](#)
[Symbols](#)
[Revolution](#)
[Parents](#)
[Science](#)
[Money](#)
[Love](#)
[Time](#)
[Insurance](#)

The author's journey

This is day one. I have finally started putting words onto paper! This is a project that has been based mostly in my head for the last two and a half years, and I can tell you, it's pretty scary. I never dreamed in my life that I would be writing a book of this nature, something which covers topics that up until 2002 I had never even thought about. This is how I got here.

Since 2002 I have read many books on everything from self-composting toilets to quantum physics for beginners, but none seemed to make the slightest bit of difference to my life. I have been shown how to recognize the aura (whatever that is). I joined amnesty international and greenpeace, and learned traditional thai massage; I did yoga; I wanted to be a monk; I became a vegetarian, and took a lot of stick for it; I gave up alcohol then realised I liked it too much; I could see the problems in the world and simple solutions to them but never did anything about it; I gave up smoking, then went back to it, again and again; I wanted to change the world, but could I really be bothered?

Deep inside there was always something missing. Commitment. A faint voice that echoed in the depths of my brain that kept repeating, "Why are you putting yourself through this alan? What is the point of all this, why don't you just conform, get a good job, get married, have children, have a nice house with pretty curtains, a stable job, nice new car, two holidays a year, a pension for my retirement, a private health plan, and a funeral plan so my children won't have to worry. Come on, look at your parents nice houses, they're pretty nice; just go with the flow and everything will be ok".

But something was always wrong. Deep down I could never understand why I always had to conform.

This always caused my parents great stress and anxiety, as they always imagined I'd follow in my father's footsteps to become a captain of industry.

I was their hope, being an only child. My parents had never been to university, as that was not the done thing when they were young. "It's time to leave school, young lady" my mother was told, "time to get a job and start earning your keep."

Back then my parents did need the money. My grandparents were working class folk with no savings, so every penny was important. Things were tough; the world was just coming out of the second world war and everything was tight, so I understand why my parents wanted the best for me; they just wanted to make sure that I was secure in the world. Its only natural and I can understand that sentiment completely.

When I was young I always imagined what it would be like to be a famous author, famous actor, or a famous singer! I showed some promise in the arts between the age of five and twelve; but like all young dreams, these gave way to real life, real problems at school, real problems at home; and the realization that normal people just get jobs, they don't become famous musicians – especially when they can't play their instruments very well or write very good songs. (although it seems to have worked for several popular artists!)

So I left school before finishing my education at seventeen. I can't really remember why, but I think I discovered alcohol, cigarettes and women during the summer. At the start of the new school year I was sent out to find a job and I unenthusiastically set to myself to work and ended up leaving every job, or getting fired for arguing with the boss.

To be honest with you I'm not at all sure why or what I was playing at in the first few years. Job, no job, job, no job, back to education, don't finish, no job, job, job, no job. Unbelievable, when I think about it. I guess I always had a feeling of entitlement, without effort. You see, my parents had money and had been successful, so I thought it would be ok to just ride along that wave and see where I ended up.

I always needed money though, which was always handed over after a one hour lecture about how useless I was in life. Did I mention my parents split up? Well, although this was not a happy period for myself or my mother, and one which I spent years avoiding thinking about, it did provide me with a unique sort of leverage. A way to manipulate both parents into handing over their hard earned cash, and instead of only being able to do it once, I could do it twice (until they started asking each other if I had asked for money).

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Years of unrest followed. Job, fired, no job; job, left job, no job; except now I was going for very good jobs in the information technology industry, and no-one could understand what I was playing at.

“Why do you keep getting fired?” they all asked. “Everyone really liked you, then it all fell apart.”

Well to be honest with you, I'd had enough of them. I was always very nice to everyone in the beginning and I respected my bosses. After all, I had been brought up very well (to be polite), but then I started to see what they couldn't see about themselves – that they were useless, uninteresting people, who didn't really know what they were doing! (so I thought).

They started to dislike this obviously threatening behaviour from one of their subordinates and summarily had me fired (or I got wind of it and hastily tendered my resignation and left my company car keys at reception).

It all seems such a long time ago now, but it was only 1999 when I left my “semi” comfortable life to embark on world travel and see where the wind took me. Australia was first, where I travelled aimlessly, spending money on enjoyment, and gaining new experiences, spending thousands on learning new things that at first grabbed my interest, but then faded away leaving me with nothing but experience and an empty wallet. Interesting to note was my approach to employment: No different to home. Job. Leave job. No Job.

The trouble was, I just wasn't interested in anything, but I knew that there was something I wanted to do but I couldn't quite work out what it was. It wasn't like a religious calling, more a selfish need to do more exciting things.

Then I met a girl, who was also travelling and we fell in love. It wasn't really love at first sight – we really didn't like each other at all. She was a vegetarian and I couldn't understand it. She didn't drink, smoke or take drugs, but she wasn't really much interested in saving the world either. She just existed, not doing any harm. I carried on drinking too much, smoking too much and generally having a good time.

We got together and travelled down to Sydney; and for the first time in a long time, I was happy. I carried on travelling, experiencing, learning new things, albeit external skills and experiences, until 2002.

I am not quite sure what happened, but something, whatever it was, made me suddenly care more. I'm not sure what I cared more about, but I was beginning to realise that I had to do something more, not career wise or travelling, but for the world!

I joined up with the amnesty international urgent action network to help stop people being tortured or executed, but did nothing else for the next two years until something changed. It was a kind of instantaneous slap in the face wake up call. I suddenly realised that everything I had been doing was not meaningless but was just a selfish self-indulgent party I had been living my whole life.

I decided to do something to help myself and others, although I wasn't sure what. I observed life in the cities, in the country, on the beach; and started observing myself every day in every action. It drove everyone crazy. I would keep pointing things out, and people would patiently listen.

After boring my friends and family to tears for over a year I decided to start writing down what was troubling me. I wrote the words down and suddenly realised I had an awful lot of words but no way to express them. “The natural mind – waking up” was born. This book would be my revolution for myself.

I started to write it and two and a half years later I still am.

Like life, the book is a process which has evolved every day out of new experiences, new understanding and observation. This book can never truly be finished as I am forever in a state of learning, but I hope it gives you as much insight reading it as I got writing it.

[Back to Index](#)

Dialogue one

I would like to engage with you, start a dialogue with you. I want you to be part of this book. I want to have a two way conversation with you, to involve you, the reader, even if you don't want to be involved! Just listen to the quiet (or loud) voice in your head that says, “Nonsense, he's talking rubbish”, or listen to yourself making instant judgements about what I have written. Whose voice is that? It's not mine! It's yours! We'll discuss why this happens later but for now lets start our dialogue.

Imagine for a moment that you are a traveller from another planet, far far away, and you have travelled for many years in search of intelligent life on other planets. You live in a land some may call utopia, where people are happy in themselves, have plenty of food to eat, and don't need stimulants to distract them. They know no violence, care for the planet, and don't need religion because they are not afraid. They don't kill animals for meat or sport, live in self sustaining communities, harness power from the sea, the sun and the wind, share resources, don't need retail therapy, and are not blinded by desire or greed (phew that's a lot of things.) This is a land where governments don't exist, and there are no guns, armies, or generals. The oceans and rivers are clean and unpolluted this a planet where life is just about perfect.

STOP! Hang on. I can hear you already! It's that little voice in your head saying:

“It's not possible! He doesn't know what he's talking about! This is pure rubbish, why did I start to read this book? You have to have a government! Who's going to control the people? What, no army? What if there was a war? No violence, impossible! No alcohol?”

Now, I am not here to talk about Utopian societies and how it is possible to create one, I just wanted you to hear that voice in your head, the “me,” the seemingly separate part of your brain which does a lot of internal chattering.

Try this now if you will. Listen carefully to these statements.

1. I am more likely to be robbed by a black man in the street.
2. Politicians are corrupt.
3. War is justified in certain circumstances to preserve peace.
4. If we didn't have a police force I would be attacked and my house would be robbed by “bad” people.
5. I don't like rich people.
6. Muslims are dangerous.
7. America is evil, they are trying to control the world.
8. Gypsies are bad people, they will try to steal everything from me.
9. Capitalism is bad for the world.
10. Multiculturalism is bad for my country.
11. Capitalism is good for the world.
12. My way of life is the best, I wouldn't like to live in another country.
13. The terrorists want to kill me.
14. I must protect myself and my family from the world. It's a very dangerous place.
15. I care about my position in society.
16. I am not materialistic, I just want to be comfortable.

You may be noticing something interesting happening here already. Some statements may have a positive impact on you (meaning that you have an instantaneous reaction to them) whilst others have a neutral effect. This is the first evidence of the conditioned mind – one that has been programmed by our parents, culture, memory, traditions, politicians, school, peer groups and media.

Not convinced? Good! We are inquiring on this together, so lets explore a little deeper.

When we are born what is in our mind?

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

There are many views on this, about genetic characteristics etc., but I prefer to think of the newborn brain as a blank sheet of paper – a sponge ready to soak up information. Do you think you had any view on specific types of people, cultures or politics when you were born? Did you have the need to protect yourself from the unknown? Of course you didn't, and neither did I. So where did all this fear and prejudice come from? Would you really like to admit here that you don't like pakistanis, or chinese people, err, just because, you know?

No, I don't know, and neither do you probably. You see, the view we have of other people is created by those around us; those who are passing off second hand opinions of entire nations, and thinking they are very, very clever to have come up with this all on their own, surrounded by a group of followers who are laughing and agreeing. You know him; you may even be him.

Lets start by where we get these opinions from, shall we? Why don't we like black people, white people, christians, muslims, americans, french, greeks, jews, germans or arabs? The list is limitless, because somewhere in the world somebody has something bad to say, not just about an individual person, but an entire nation!

Lets go back to our beginning. Where did our information come from?

Well, we were handed down beliefs and opinions from our parents and close family. And where did they get their views from? Of course, it was their parents and family, teachers, friends, co-workers, government, and media.

I think that's a good start, don't you?

When you are first born, your family, the ones who love you most, start conditioning you to think a certain way by filling your head with second hand prejudices, media views from thirty years ago, politicians views from the past, and generally anything that anybody important had to say on television or in the newspaper at some time in the past. If they don't like something, then they see it as their absolute duty to make sure you not only understand it, but believe it without question; and for the children who do question, they should be prepared for a swift "Don't question what I am saying, I am your father!"

"Don't mix with those children, they're not jewish"

"Always say your prayers"

"Don't answer back, your mother knows best"

"Do this, think this, do that, don't do that."

It's amazing we ever get past the age of five! Everything your parents teach you, they learnt from the past, yet they continue to force their conditioning onto you, a blank sheet, without any knowledge that what they are doing is harming you.

Now, whilst most of us would agree that $2 + 2 = 4$, and that dogs go woof, and cats go miaow, what concerns us here is how easily influenced we are when we are young. As we love and trust our parents, we would never think they would be pass on faulty information to us – especially as we have no means of checking whether it is false, or not. So when you are young, it makes sense to accept what they say is true.

As you get older you do form your own opinions, but without your knowledge, the foundations have already been laid, the conditioning is almost complete.

Culture, tradition, religion, teachers, media and parents are all involved in your conditioning to behave a certain way. Now I am not saying that you are being conditioned to do wrong, in fact, quite the opposite. Most of us would agree that some conditioning has been helpful to us in our lives. What I am interested in discussing with you is why you think a certain way, and why you behave a certain way.

What I want to know is, do you know why you do the things you do?

You see, most of us believe that the way we think is solely our own opinions. We do not believe we have been influenced by any outside party, and we are prepared to challenge anybody who thinks that we have.

"I am an independent thinker! I make decisions based on the evidence available!"

Listen to this statement.

"I support the death penalty for child murderers"

Do you? Why?

"Because" starts your brain, "they have killed a human being so they must be punished. They have broken

the law; they are evil, and they must face the ultimate punishment.”

Listen to this next statement, carefully.

“If a soldier kills in war it is justified. They are fighting an evil oppressive regime that is killing their own people.”

Where is the difference?

“Well,” says your brain, “the difference is, that the man who killed the child was an evil, sick, depraved human being, whereas the soldier who kills is doing it for freedom and justice, and is trying to help other human beings live their lives free from oppression”

For some of you this is an open and shut case. The ultimate Good vs. Evil. And on the surface, “good” seems to win. But wait a minute, this wasn't the question. I am not talking about the pros and cons of the death penalty here, we could be involved in a useless argument for many weeks, and in fact politicians and pressure groups from both sides are fighting about this all the time. Lets go a bit deeper than they do. Let us ask the question about how I choose sides? Where is my opinion coming, from and how long did it take me to decide?

A. I Support the death penalty

B. I am opposed to the death penalty

I guess most people would have fallen on one side or the other in, oh, lets say 0.2 of a second! That's interesting, because less than a minute ago, weren't you “an independent thinker” making “decisions based on the evidence available”?

I'm sorry, but I don't think there was any time for deep thought there, do you? So if you weren't thinking deeply, how did you decide whether you were for or against?

Well, you read the newspapers, you see television reports of murders, your parents had an opinion, your government has an opinion, and your religion has an opinion. During your life your brain has had this information imprinted upon it and your opinion has been formed. Quietly and secretly, your brain has subconsciously processed all of this, and is ready to give its opinion in a split second.

Even if I had given you one hour to think about the question, you would still be using your conditioned brain, using newspaper reports, parents objections, government ministers speeches, or quotes from your religious upbringing.

I don't want you to feel uncomfortable with this type of questioning; I want to include you in this dialogue as we are trying to get to the bottom of why we actually think the way we do. I am not here to agree or disagree with you on the merits of killing child murderers.

Let me ask you another question. Does being in an army require conditioning (which is to establish a conditioned response)?

Well, let's think about what an army does. They are a highly armed force employed by the government, and paid for by you, to defend your country from invaders. How do they defend your country? Well, they are trained that if an “enemy” comes into sight they must kill him (to defend you). There is no time for thought here. You are wearing a green uniform, they are wearing a brown uniform and you have been trained to kill anyone you see with a brown uniform, as he has been trained to kill anyone in a green uniform! No decisions needed here, you have your orders.

It doesn't matter if your opponent is a nice man who attends church regularly, has two beautiful children, and regularly does charity work to help the homeless. Nor does he care that you are recently married and your wife will give birth to your first baby next month.

You see each other, your brain processes the colour of the uniform, and you fire upon your enemy. Not because you have any specific quarrel with the man, but because you have been told that people in green/brown uniforms are “the enemy.” You see, an army can't function if there's any independent thinking going on. They must condition you to function as a unit, with only one brain active, that of the commander.

Army commanders have long known that you must condition the soldier, to “break his spirit,” so he becomes a machine who will never question why we are attacking this or that enemy. So what happens if a soldier starts having a conscience? Well, in the first world war especially, they made examples of people who disobeying orders or deserted. They were shot. Yes, that's right, killed by their own side as cowards. Imagine that, being killed by your own countrymen. Of course, these days the army will tell you that it's not like that

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

any more, but they must still condition the soldier to only obey orders. That is how an army functions.

I think that's enough discussion about the army, lets see if we can create a list made up of the following:

1. Who do you respect?
2. Who do you admire?
3. Who do you hold in high esteem?
4. Who do you hate?
5. Who do you love?

Was it easy? Yes?

"I respect my boss, I admire the prime minister, I hold the pope in high esteem, I hate dictators, I love my wife."

Done. List finished.

Not so fast! You see, we all have people we admire, respect, love, hold in high esteem or hate, and for everyone it's different. In some countries some people may have included a man who we consider as a brutal dictator under their "respect" or "hold in high esteem" sections, where someone else may have them under the "hate" section. How can this be? Well, you and I are getting closer to uncovering why you think the way you do; why you love a dictator, and I hate him.

But in order to do that, we first need to investigate the words themselves. Love, hate, respect, admire, and esteem. Not the dictionary definition, but the feeling behind the word. We will try to understand, word by word, what it really means when I say "I respect you," or "I admire him." We must endeavour to put aside our conditioning, in order that we can put these words under the microscope and see their true meaning.

This will be a difficult task for all of us, as our beliefs and opinions are firmly rooted in the past: in tradition, in culture, and in education. We must tread very carefully to get to the truth; something which neither I nor anyone else can tell you or show you; something that can only be seen by individuals who have broken free of conditioning and are investigating, like you and I, into the true nature of everything.

[Back to Index](#)

**This book is non-linear. You do not need to read each topic in order.
Either scroll through the book and find a topic to engage with or start at the first one.
It may take you years to finish the book, or a week, and that's ok, or you may put it down after page
one, and that's ok too.
Everything is perfect.**

A

Acceptance

1. *The mental attitude that something is believable and should be accepted as true*
2. *The state of being acceptable and accepted*

*Accept nothing that anyone says to be true
only if you experience it will you truly know*

I would like to start by contradicting myself, so please accept my apologies. There is just one thing I would like you to start accepting, and it is a brave person that does so. That is, accepting yourself for who you are. This acceptance is the first step on the way to awareness of self, and the world around you.

So many of us start by trying to change ourselves and/or our environment around us. This is precisely the mistake I made when I embarked on my journey of self-exploration, several years ago. I thought that by changing *me*, I would become a happier, more fulfilled person immediately. What I found, was that I was resisting the change. Half of me wanted to change, and the other half did not. Millions of you around the world will know what I mean.

I mentioned in the introduction that I bought many self-help books, and studied yoga, amongst other things, in a half-hearted attempt to change. What was I changing? Anything and everything I didn't like about myself – only it didn't work the way I expected it to.

I found that the more I tried to change, and the more it didn't work, the more anxious I became. I began to question my ability to fundamentally change. I tried giving up smoking and it didn't work, so I bought more books and cd's on giving up smoking, and became more and more frustrated the more I kept smoking. I bought books on becoming less angry, and although I felt slightly less angry in certain situations, it was only superficial. Deep inside I knew I still had anger within me. All of this attempted change was making me feel worse and worse! Why was I putting myself through this? Why was I bothering?

I stayed like this for three years, constantly wrestling with myself, until one day it came to me that, it was only when I accepted who I was, that I could transcend it. So I did! Sounds too easy? Well it was!

It doesn't matter if you are too fat, too angry, too obsessive, too controlling, or too violent; once you say, "I accept myself for who I am" you are dealing with the whole. It is when you divide yourself into the "I" that wants to change," and the "other" that does not, that the trouble begins; do you follow what I am trying to say here?

When you start a conversation with yourself that says "I," you have created division, and you are not acting as a whole. It is only when the division is resolved through acceptance, and awareness, without the use of language, that the process can begin. It is only then that you will see clearly.

How many of us spend our days having conversations with ourselves, chiding ourselves about things we have said, people we have upset, and things we have done, but not "meant" to? I'm sure we all have. There is no point in saying; "I shouldn't have got angry with my wife last night," "I shouldn't have hit that man," "I should have gone to the gym," "I shouldn't have eaten that huge burger and chips," "I should lose weight," or "I should spend more time with my family." If you were going to do any of those things, you would have done them; right? Do not torment yourself by saying "Why can't I change," or "why can't I be a better father/mother/friend/lover/human being?" You are just perfect the way you are. You are you. Accept it.

Accept what you are. Accept what you do. Accept what you say. Accept that you are a wonderful human being. Accept that you are a creator of joy in the world. Accept that you are violent. Accept that you are too fat. Accept that you hurt people with your words and your actions.

Do *not* try to change

Change without acceptance and awareness is an external process created through division – division of self. Accept yourself and become whole. Once you have accepted yourself, just start to pay attention to your words, your thoughts and your actions. Do not judge them; do not interact with them, just watch silently.

I am sorry to keep repeating myself about accepting yourself, but it really is *most* important that you do. But don't take my word for it. Look into it yourself!

You may say, "What if I don't want to accept myself?" Well, my answer to you is don't. I am not here to force you to do anything you don't want to do, merely to point things out you may, or may not have been aware of. Do you understand what I am trying to discuss with you here?

What I must stress though, is that we are talking about acceptance of yourself, not acceptance of the intolerable situations that surround us on this planet. In fact, we must not accept the violence, the greed, the power, the armies, and the weapons, to name but a few! But that is another topic.

The other point I must make is that acceptance does not equal ignorance. It's all very well to say, "Yes, I

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

accept I am a wife beater, and a drunk, but actually, I don't care," and then carry on doing it. Some of you may take me to task on this and say, "What is the point of him accepting himself as a drunk and wife beater, if he continues to be a wife beater and a drunk?"

On the surface, it's a good argument. But how do you expect him to change? Shall we force him? Shall we hold him down, until he agrees he will change? Of course not! What we want to do is help him see who, and what he is. Only then, can the true work of transformation begin inside him. It can never be an external process.

Over the years, many people have tried to encourage, cajole, bribe, or threaten me into changing. "Be more like this, alan; don't do it this way, alan; why are you doing that, alan; you should change," and little good it did me. It was only through acceptance of who I was, and awareness of myself in action, that the transformation began.

Don't try to force it. Relax into the acceptance and you will start to notice a difference almost straight away. What kind of difference is anybody's guess! But you will notice a difference.

We also have to accept something else, and that is the power of nature. We have little understanding of how nature works, yet we meddle with it all the time; from setting off nuclear explosions, to damming rivers. We have no idea of the damage we are causing to the planet and, let's face it, destruction on a large scale has only started happening in the last hundred years, when full-scale industrialisation has gripped the world.

I do not want to be one, who preaches impending doom, but at the rate we're exploiting the world, something has to give. Do you agree?

We have recently seen the devastating effect of a tsunami on a coastline, and there have been hurricanes, cyclones, floods, and earthquakes, all causing death in their path; but the thing we have to remember, as we watch people screaming, and ambulances carrying away the injured, is that nature isn't "evil," it's not "doing" this to us deliberately! We just happen to have expanded our territories into areas where these natural events occur. I say events, because it is only us that sees it as a disaster. The rest of the planet just moves on.

Unfortunately, the reason it hits us so hard, is that we believe everything we create should be permanent. We believe that all our possessions, wealth, and property will always be there for us, no matter what. It is because we are so attached to these items, and the status they give us in society, that we find it so hard to let them go. On the television, we see pictures of people crying, not because they've lost a loved one, but because their house was flooded and they had lost all their possessions.

If we are to accept ourselves in the world, we have to accept that nature is more powerful than we are, and we cannot control it, nor should we try to. This earth was created by natural forces of such power; we couldn't start to imagine it. If you want any evidence of power in nature, you just have to look at the sun.

We had better start accepting and respecting nature, and realise that everything is impermanent, ready to be swept away at nature's whim, and that if nature decides it's time to pull the plug on the earth, no amount of money, gold, sports cars, or designer suits will be able to stop it! That should give you give you something to think about!

[Back to Index](#)

Addiction 1

1. *Being abnormally tolerant to and dependent on something that is psychologically or physically habit-forming (especially alcohol or narcotic drugs)*
 2. *An abnormally strong craving*

My Voice

*I can hear it, can you?
The voice in my head that says; let's just have one, maybe two
Try as I might, fight, fight, fight
I always give in to the craving*

*Straight down to the pub, I feel a little strange
I feel dazed, and confused, why am I here?
I feel guilt and I feel shame
It's not going to happen again
I'll never touch another drop, after this shot*

*Last hangover was death
I felt I would die
I felt anxious, I felt crazed
I felt like running away
Why did I drink until dawn the next day?*

*Now I remember the day I got drunk
It felt like a calling, a job to be done
you'll drink until you're happy, don't answer back
and so I obeyed, until my whole world went black*

*and here I am again, preparing to drink
standing in line, waiting for service
anticipation, my heart races faster
I know it's not good, but I just can't help it*

*The thought of the sweet liquid, warming my heart
the laughter I'll share, the fun I will have
then I hear the voice, urging me on
let's just have one drink; it's nice to feel nice*

*No! I hear you this time
It's over, my friend
I see you this time
You are me, but I am not you
I grab my coat and head for the door*

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

I can only assume it's a mistake, what do you think? Some design flaw; something nature, the universe, or evolution overlooked. How could it be possible that the human body, the most advanced system on the planet, or indeed the galaxy (perhaps), can actively want something that isn't good for it?

Now, I am not a scientist or psychologist, but in the face of true adversity, we know that humans will struggle to survive. Throughout history, there are stories of courage where people have survived, in what most would consider, hopeless situations. In fact, humans will do anything to survive. It is part of our built-in evolutionary program to keep the species alive – to avoid extinction at all costs.

There will always be some scientist who tells you that a glass of red wine a day is beneficial to your health, and because we love drinking, we take their advice. If they told us a glass of wine a day was bad for us, how would we feel then?

Remember at the beginning of the twentieth century, when they told us cigarettes were good for us? "*Cigarettes Help with Asthma*," said the poster. I don't think we could find many scientists who would agree today. So, we have to take a different approach, you and I. We have to investigate why we drink, smoke, and take drugs, and why ultimately, we become addicted to them.

Governments, religious leaders, social welfare groups, and people of influence, all talk about a "war on drugs." This all sounds very noble, but what are they declaring war *on*? Are they declaring "war" on the people for taking the drugs, or the drugs themselves?

We will deal with narcotic drugs in the drugs topic, but what I want to know is, why deal with such intensity on just one section of the things that addict us.

Believe what you will, but most people do not take "illegal" drugs, though millions and millions of people drink and smoke. The cost to our society (society meaning you, me, and everyone else who lives on this planet) of alcohol and cigarettes is immeasurable. I am not talking about money. I am talking about a society that condones and accepts alcohol and cigarettes as a fully-fledged member of the community. Let's look into this a little more closely. If drugs like ecstasy and marijuana are illegal, why isn't alcohol?

I don't know if you've ever seen people out on the streets late at night, coming out of the bars. There's always people drunk, fighting, being sick, falling over, or urinating in the street. Police are inevitably called: An ambulance for the stab victim after a drunken brawl, the girl needing her stomach pumped, the lad passed out in a doorway.

Despite what the government would have you know, most drugs do not make you act in this way. In fact, someone who had smoked a lot of marijuana would probably be unable, or unwilling to leave the chair they smoked it in, let alone start a fight on the street!

Before I am accused of being pro-drugs and anti-government, I would add that I am merely illuminating the point I am making about the different emphasis and priorities our society places on different addictive substances.

Do the monkeys snort cocaine?

Do the birds smoke marijuana?

Do the fish drink beer?

Do the elephants inject heroin?

I hear some of you laughing at my silly example, but be serious for a moment. Do they? Well, if they don't, and we are the most intelligent life form on the planet, why do we do it?

Have you ever watched the birds in the trees or the animals in the forest? Have you seen the cows in the fields, the ducks in the pond, or the great beasts on the african plains? You don't see them sitting round the watering hole smoking marijuana with a beer in hand. If you have, the photo would be worth rather a lot of money.

So here we are in 2006, millions of people drinking too much alcohol, taking too many drugs, and smoking too many cigarettes, all of which are poisonous to our system; a living system, so finely balanced, yet still able to process the worst we can throw at it – a truly remarkable piece of machinery.

Let's look at our car, the family pride and joy for a moment. Would you put cigarettes and marijuana into

the tank to help it run (I have excluded alcohol, as some cars can now run on types of alcohol)? Would you add cocaine to chicken to make it healthier? Would you add tobacco to your salad dressing to make it taste nicer? Would you give your newborn baby a glass of wine with their meal? Of course you wouldn't, and neither would I. It is unimaginable to any of us.

So why do we willingly put these toxins into our own systems? Because, somewhere along the long line of evolution we have addicted ourselves, and the body wrongly mistakes toxic chemicals for nutrients. Surely, no intelligent system would design itself with such an inherent built-in weakness – a need for something that unbalances or poisons it.

As we have already discussed, the human being is the most advanced system on the planet, the only living organism on the planet capable of conscious thought, of constructing complex ideas, of philosophising about the nature of themselves. Other animals just live in the world, eating and drinking exactly what their systems need to remain in balance, and procreating. You wouldn't see an elephant hunting a zebra, or a lion eating tomatoes.

Let's us now go into this again. Why do we take drugs, smoke cigarettes, and drink alcohol, if it is not for the benefit of the system? What is the one thing that makes us take these substances, even against our better judgement? I'll offer a word:

Pleasure

1. A fundamental feeling that is hard to define but that people desire to experience

Pure pleasure. If it isn't nice, and it's not good for us, why do we take it? If you don't like olives, you don't eat them, do you? Pure pleasure. The alcohol, the narcotic drug, the cigarette, they all bind to the pleasure centres of the brain. The only problem with pure pleasure is the cost associated with it. That cost is addiction.

You see, when your brain experiences pure pleasure, it wants more of it, your body wants more of it, and it motivates you to go and get it, whether it is good for the balance of the system or not. It has tasted the chemical sensation of pleasure and it isn't about to let it go.

Narcotic drugs – in their present form – have only been in wide supply for the past forty years or so, and used to be prohibitively expensive for the average wage earner, so it makes sense that society is more addicted to cheaper products like alcohol and tobacco, which have been in existence for many hundreds of years and are legal. When I say legal, I mean approved by the government as acceptable for human consumption, because they know they get huge revenue from tobacco and alcohol sales. Lots of politicians also smoke and drink, and if they banned it, they would be pretty sure of not getting into power next time around! To drink alcohol and smoke is our right; it would be as undemocratic as banning shopping at the supermarkets.

When insight comes a knocking

Please read on a little with me here, even if you don't think you may be addicted to any substance.

It is a shocking moment indeed when you get some insight into yourself, isn't it? The moment you realise something you are doing is not serving your best interests; something you may have ignored for many years and now you notice it! You notice the smell on your clothes, the yellow nicotine fingers, the bad breath, the smell of alcohol in the morning, the headache that's killing you, the depressed feeling that you got drunk again, or did drugs when you had been clean for a month. You suddenly notice you crave a fix, or a cigarette. It's a terrible feeling, and I know it well. You have been awoken to what is commonly known as addiction.

A personal story

Even when you want to stop, it is all around you, legal and illegal. Why? Because your peer group is still

there; be it the smokers in the office, the seasoned drinkers in your pub, or the junkies you get your fix with. I know. I was the information technology specialist who worked for the big companies, that no one would have thought couldn't give up cigarettes, let alone alcohol, as I never showed the slightest indication I was addicted.

This is probably you as well. Believe it or not, most addicted people are employed and live a relatively normal life and are shielded from view by those around them (such as family or friends, who may also be addicted and who give an air of normalcy to the situation), and any time I wanted to stop smoking, colleagues would say "come on alan, we miss having you downstairs for a smoke," and like a fool, I followed.

My friends from the pub would phone me to ask where I was. If I said, "I'm not drinking tonight," I'd get a reply like "What, you? Not drinking? Come on alan, see you in the pub in half an hour," and with huge anxiety about starting drinking again, but with a sneaky bit of excitement, I prepared myself to get drunk.

And so it went on, week after week, and year after year. I would try to avoid being invited anywhere in case I had to drink (something, which once I started, was mighty enjoyable and great fun).

Everywhere I went, whether it be to new countries, having new experiences, or starting a new life, I found myself in a group at the bar, drinking until I was drunk (fortunately I only ever tried drugs a handful of times, due to the huge anxiety and fear I was left with the next day). I tried everything to block it out of my mind; I tried every technique available, purchased courses on the internet, bought self-help books, and I even went for therapy, where I was told that my addictions were a result of trauma in my childhood.

Admittedly, my parents' separation had a large effect on me, and that may have contributed to me trying to numb the pain with alcohol, but I also liked the feeling I got from it and it doesn't explain why I couldn't quit when I wanted to, does it? It's all too easy to look for reasons why we started, but not look at reasons for stopping. This was one of the big problems for me. Although on the surface I wanted to stop, and I felt as if everyone was trying to get me to drink or smoke, I had no real commitment. I would have stopped if it was easy, but as I explained previously, pure pleasure has a cost, and this time the cost was that it was difficult to stop. This was a complete surprise to me, as I thought I would be able to quit any time. How wrong I was.

Addicted – true or false?

Let me ask those of you do not believe you are addicted to alcohol or cigarettes, a question. If I asked you to quit smoking right now, never go down the pub again, never have another glass of wine with your meal, or never lift your glass to celebrate another birthday, what would you say? What if I told you you could never drink or smoke again? How would you feel? Happy, relieved, calm, or maybe just a little bit nervous?

"I could stop if I really wanted to, I just don't want to," you plead. "I just enjoy a pint with the lads, a cigarette after lunch, or a nice glass of wine at dinner, I don't need it, I just want it. After all, there aren't too many pleasures left in life."

And there it is; once the brain has tasted pleasure, it isn't going to let it go without a fight, and remember that the people who don't think they're addicted, need it too. "I just enjoy it." "It's just one or two." "It's purely social." "I only smoke/take drugs /drink socially."

So why take these substances, if it is only to be sociable? Let's go into what this could mean, shall we? Is it the need to conform? Is it being afraid to say no, wanting to be accepted, and joining in with the group? Well, partly I would say, as I know from personal experience that when I am out with friends it is hard to say no, and still be a part of the group. This is where it gets rather difficult, as where do you separate the "me" from the "we?"

We all want to be part of the "in" group; we want to be liked, accepted, with people laughing at our jokes; it feels nice, doesn't it, to be wanted? Being included in the "in" group requires that you conform to the majority of the group. Now I am not saying that all groups drink, smoke, or take drugs, but that is the subject we are dealing with here.

I would suggest that most people, when they get together, enjoy a drink or two, not to get drunk, just merely to be sociable, would you agree? Say for example, you always had a beer when I offered you one, and this week you have decided to quit drinking, so you can concentrate on getting fit. Have you noticed how awkward you begin to feel at social gatherings, hoping that no one offers you a drink/joint/cigarette "just in

case” you say yes, then hating yourself in the morning for not being able to quit? “Why am I such an *idiot*?” you ask yourself.

At this point, one of two interesting things begins to happen. Either you decide to keep drinking/smoking/taking drugs in order not to be excluded, in which case you will probably start to hate yourself more, or if you are serious about quitting, you start finding excuses not to go to group gatherings where alcohol/drugs/cigarettes are consumed. Soon you find that you stop phoning your friends, or they stop phoning you so much, as you no longer have the one strong bond that keeps you together, and you start to seek out new friends.

Let me ask you another question, what is it that bonds groups together? Surely, it is a common interest, something you enjoy doing together, like sport, learning, arts appreciation, walking, or any number of other hobbies. If you are in a group where addictive substances are not the main reason to be together, then you will probably find that it is easier to stay friends with people when you quit. If you go running with people and they go for a drink afterwards, it is fairly easy just to say “no thanks,” without any further inquiry on the group’s part. It is only where the common bond is the drugs, smoking, or alcohol, that you will be rejected by, or will reject, the group when quitting.

You see, if your group’s main activity is drinking in the pub, smoking outside at work, or taking drugs, the substance is more important than the individual, and you can easily be replaced by someone else who conforms.

If you stop drinking, and all your friends were from the pub, what have you got in common with the group any more? You may have done things together, like sports, days out, even holidays together, and spent time in each other’s houses, but when the drinking stops, you will find you begin to have less and less in common. It’s not like the example of the runner who quits drinking; he still has a common bond with the group. You do not.

So, do you still smoke/drink/take drugs to be “sociable?” Is it necessary? Do you need to do it? And before you all answer immediately, “Yes I do want to be sociable; I like to have a drink with my friends, it doesn’t mean I’m addicted, and I’m not going to change for anybody,” go back to the beginning of the “addicted or not?” section.

So can you now live without your substances? Have we enquired enough into this subject so we feel happy without them? Can you now live a wonderful life without them? Will you be more successful? Probably not. This is because your mind is still constructing arguments why you should still drink/smoke/take drugs.

Once the brain has tasted pleasure
It isn’t going to let it go without a fight

Many of you will now feel as though I have not dealt with the matter of addiction, that you are the normal one, and you are probably thinking that addiction means two bottles of vodka a day, drug addicts sitting in doorways, or the chain-smoking office worker who smokes sixty a day. Perhaps you are thinking of homeless people urinating down their legs whilst consuming a can of ultra strong beer, or dirty syringes in run down housing estates. Although these are stereotype addictions portrayed by the mass media, it doesn’t mean you are not addicted. Remember at the beginning of the section where we noted:

“How could it be possible that the human body, the most advanced system on the planet, or indeed the galaxy, can actively want something that isn’t good for it?”

Is this not about the brain making a terrible mistake, wrongly wanting something it believes can help it survive? I cannot believe any of you would still say, that you, the most advanced system on the planet requires or needs poisons and toxins to be healthy. This cannot be a matter of personal choice such as “If I want to, I WILL put my arm in the wood chopping machine!”

We make personal choices every day, some of which are good for us, like changing career, changing our mortgage company, or moving to a new country. These may seem like important choices to you, but they have negligible impact on the healthy functioning of the system, whereas toxic addictive substances can have

immense impact on society. If you still don't think we are all addicted in some way, and that it isn't vitally important we solve this for the benefit of humanity, *and* you wish to move to a more *important* topic, please finish here!

Transcending addiction

I hope all of you are still reading, because it is important for us – and for future generations to come – to understand together how we can transcend addiction. For those of you who have never tried drugs, alcohol, or cigarettes, you are indeed fortunate, for you will never have to know the battles that rage inside when one tries to stop. Not always wildly desperate cravings, but more, a subtle voice, which is the addictive part of the brain, gently coaxing you, letting you know that everything will be all right if you just give in; that you need the substance, that it will help you get over the bad day, or the good day, and that it will bring happiness and joy, if you just give in.

The voice will probably sound more like, “Phew that was a tough day, I’m stressed, I fancy (*innocuous short form of desire/want/crave/need*) a drink/cigarette/joint/hit,” and it will be in your own voice. It’s *very* sneaky, this brain of ours! Always trying to get us to do things *it* wants. Although it doesn’t keep telling us to steal, break windows, walk in front of trains, jump off buildings, or kill people, unless it is malfunctioning in some way.

I see addiction as a malfunction of the brain’s normal working patterns. In the same way walking in front of a train is not good for us, neither is consuming these substances, otherwise everybody would be doing it all the time (like drinking water).

So why do we let our brain influence us in consuming these substances? One word: Pleasure. Instant pleasure. Instant relief. Escape from reality. Escape from reality through deep, deep pleasure. And in order to get this deep, deep pleasure, you don’t need to have attended university, or possess any special skills; you just need a little money, and the ability to lift a drink, inhale smoke, pick up a needle, or snort some powder.

This is very easy pleasure to attain, and your brain knows this. This isn’t the kind of pleasure we get on completion of a marathon, a 100 kilometre cycle ride, or a 10 kilometre swim. That kind of pleasure is difficult to achieve. It requires commitment, dedication, training, and a huge amount of physical exertion, but you get deep pleasure (tired but happy), from a series of chemicals released in the brain called endorphins, the so-called “natural-high.” But you don’t need to be an extreme sportsman to get these endorphins flowing; any physical exercise outdoors will make you feel better. You may be exhausted after only a short time, but happy you did it, and after a shower, very, very relaxed.

This isn’t the kind of pleasure most of us seek, though. We’re after a quick fix, a quick “high” (albeit an unnatural one), generated by alcohol/cigarettes/drugs, working fast on the pleasure centres of the brain, and extremely short lasting. As with anything quickly gained, there is a cost, and that cost is suffering – from the terrible cough in the morning, the nauseous feeling, the dry mouth, to feeling tense, incredible tiredness, a little more impatience, or just feeling a bit shaky. These are the signs of withdrawal.

You don’t need to have been hooked on cigarettes, heroin, or whisky for twenty years to experience withdrawal; just one night out with friends should do it. Withdrawal, a word that no one likes to hear or experience. It is the body’s way of letting you know that the high you experienced last night came at a cost.

What? You didn’t think you were going to get away with it, did you? You ingested toxic chemicals that unnaturally affected and influenced your body and brain, which resulted in an unnatural high, and you thought you would just carry on as if nothing happened? Remember, the human body is the most advanced system on the planet, and is a finely balanced piece of precision genetic engineering.

You know what happens when you put diesel fuel into a car that takes unleaded, don’t you? Your nice new car stops working. It is incompatible with the system. Except, the one problem with addictive substances is that over many centuries, the body has adapted itself to efficiently metabolise these toxins, resulting in only slight withdrawal symptoms. Even the withdrawal cycle from heroin (whilst pretty unpleasant) is relatively short. If we were not able to metabolise these substances, we would probably die. Is this not the main reason we carry on as we do? Let me explain.

Because the cost of withdrawal is not that great, we have learned to adapt our habits, in so much as if we drink too much one day, or overdo it (only measured by how severe the withdrawal is), we pull back the next

day, have a detox day or week, until we feel healthy enough to do it again. The most intelligent species on the planet? I don't think so!

We have learned to adapt our consumption of these toxins so we only suffer minor withdrawals. How do I know I have smoked/drunk too much, or taken too many drugs? Well, my body will tell me the next day. So being a cunning species, we say "Next time, I will only have five pints of beer/fifteen cigarettes/one ecstasy tablet or two joints of marijuana, as I know I can handle that level of withdrawal!"

Is this not beginning to seem a little absurd to you now? We are actively calculating how much pleasure we want to buy (consumption), and balancing it with how much we are willing to pay (withdrawal).

We eat healthy foods, balance our protein/carbohydrate intake, take vitamin supplements, drink soy milk, play sport, detox regularly, have holistic body treatments, go to spas, beautify our bodies, go to the gym, meditate, get in touch with our inner child, go to healing workshops, become "more spiritual." Then, it's off for a few glasses of wine.

This is turning into a joke! Can you see it too? We never have to justify going to have a massage or going for a run, but our addicted brain still comes up with reasons to have addictive substances! I've just had the most wonderful macrobiotic, organic vegetarian meal, and now I'm off for a bottle of wine with my good friend to catch up on all the gossip! We want to be good (balanced), but that little part of our brain keeps up the chatter. In the following example below, drugs and cigarettes are mostly interchangeable with drink.

Excuses our brain comes up with

I just fancy one.

I'm going for a pint; I've had a hard day.

Let's go out for a few drinks tonight.

I'm really angry about what happened; I need a drink.

She really annoyed me, with what she said, I'm off to the pub.

It's alan's birthday! We should go out for a few drinks to help him celebrate.

I'm lonely without him, I'll just go for a few drinks and see if anyone's out tonight.

I hate my boss. He's so horrible to me; I'm going to have a bottle of wine when I get home.

It's our anniversary; we should celebrate with a nice bottle of champagne.

I've been so stressed lately; I just need a few to relax.

I'm bored, there's nothing to do I'm going for a drink.

This is a lovely meal; a glass of red wine would go down nicely.

If we're going round to their house, we should take some drinks with us.

I'm really glad I passed my exams; let's get drunk.

I've got a new job! Let's celebrate!

Amazing, isn't it? If we look closely, we can see that the alcohol/drugs/cigarettes actually exist independently of the thought or action. Isn't a nice meal, just a nice meal? If you're bored, find something to do. Yes, it is hard being lonely, stress is unpleasant, and it's great you've got a new job, these are normal things in life, but does everything we think about or do require alcohol to be present?

Let's look more closely. If it really were necessary, we would be required to take it by law to operate machines at work, drive our cars, do exams, do the end of year accounts, type better, or play better sport. Of course, this would be ridiculous to suggest, and no one would agree with me. So let us say that alcohol slows us down (at the very least), where we start to lose control of certain motor functions. Our speech slurs, our balance starts to go as the drug takes over more of our brain, our perceptions alter, and our thoughts change. The stomach finds it hard to deal with and we become nauseous. We become less coherent in dealing with complex subjects; and we become almost animal like, in groups banding together, ready to challenge imagined slights or disrespect from opposing groups or individuals:

"What are you looking at; do you want a fight about it?"

"He was looking at my girlfriend, let's get him."

No matter how many times your brain disputes all this, the only reason it is doing so is to satisfy its need for these substances. It has no concept of consequences, resulting from consumption or over consumption, and frankly doesn't care. It doesn't care if you lose your job because you were drunk too many times in the

morning, or that you have started to steal to support a heroin habit, or that you are struggling with walking up a hill because you can't breathe after smoking so much. Even the bad times are secretly hidden, and all you remember are the good times.

This part of the brain that is addicted has no concept of reality, although the mistaken requests it makes are real enough, as anyone who feels desperate for a cigarette well knows. Whether you believe you are addicted or not, the fact remains that whilst you keep smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, or taking drugs, your brain – and therefore you – remains addicted and you are under its control.

Stopping anything is a stressful time, as the brain doesn't like change that may involve it not getting what it wants; and now I'm talking about chocolate, coffee, cheese, or chicken – I'm talking about anything you really, really love. It's funny that we use the word "love" in this way, something that is normally reserved for people we deeply care about; the brain has manipulated our language, and used it to its own addictive advantage!

"I'd love a cigarette! Mmm, I'd love a cigarette right now"

And that's it! The body motivates itself and the brain directs you to the nearest pack of cigarettes or cigarette shop. Quick! Go now. When you get it, you say "aaaah, that feels better!" Who do you think really feels better, you, or the addiction in the brain?

Of course, it's not the super intelligent you. It's not *you*, the most sophisticated system on the planet, eating soybeans and organic rice after your yoga class, who needs a cigarette, is it? Even though you told me earlier how you just wanted one, that's all, how you deserve one because you're stressed. Surely not?

If you can't get any cigarettes because it's too late or the shop is closed, how do you feel? A lot more stressed than you did at work? I bet! You see, the stress at work was normal. Pressure to finish work before a deadline is stressful, but this, this is different. This is you, stressed because you can't get a highly poisonous substance to breathe into your lungs (the things that allow you to exist on this planet, by the way).

Let's take a moment to contemplate this before we take
action...

This is the moment; not a choice, but a window in time, where you are fully aware of yourself. Here and now, make a positive personal commitment to yourself, not to anyone else, to do what is best for your system. If you think of it as giving up something, you will always feel as though you are missing out (even if it is on toxic substances).

You are making this personal commitment – as I have done – to yourself, to acknowledge that you are the most advanced, intelligent being on the planet. You have greater abilities than any other living organism. You are able to make complex decisions on the future of the human race, you have the power to destroy as well as create. *You* are making this personal commitment, not the piece of faulty machinery that is the addicted brain.

***"I acknowledge that I am the most intelligent being on the planet
I will do what is best for my system
If I do not do what is best for my system
I acknowledge that I am not the most intelligent being on the planet"***

And that is all it takes to free yourself! Total freedom from addiction! Right Now!

I can hear you saying you don't feel any different, and it can't be as easy as all that, because you have tried a hundred methods to give up smoking and nothing's worked, and this is useless, and you knew it would be a waste of time, and you don't want to give up drinking anyway and "Well, I can't be bothered with this, it's too difficult."

That's because you are still you. Nothing magical happened. You made an important acknowledgement to yourself which does not bind you to not smoking, drinking or taking drugs, it just places you in the centre of an important stage, yours.

You see, your stage is the one you play from; the one where it's only you acting; there is no supporting

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

cast, no crew, no stand-ins, just you; and how you act is for you, and only you to decide. The script has not been written for you. No one is waiting to prompt you; no one cares if you mess up your lines. In the end, it is only you. This stage is your life and everybody has his or her own stage too. I have mine, the people in the pub have theirs, the people outside the office smoking have theirs, the people injecting heroin have theirs. They have to decide how to act on their stage, and how to act when around other actors' stages. If we pay too much attention to the other actors; if we worry what they think of us, or that they will not like our performances, we get trapped into only pleasing them, instead of writing our own script.

Imagine now that you are walking around on your stage, and quietly listen to the script you are reading from. "I will smoke if I want." "If I want to drink, I will." "No one's going to stop me doing what I want." "If I want to get high that's my prerogative." "I'm not affecting anyone else, leave me alone." "Look, I'm just having one more pint, all right?" "It just calms me down a bit, that's all." "Don't tell *me* what to do. I'm an adult!" "All my friends do it." "There's nothing else to do." "You're not going to change me." Can I stop there? Not much of a script, is it? I don't think anyone would buy that in hollywood, do you?

Hollywood Agent: What's the script about?

You: Well, it's about this guy and all he does is go around defending his right to do something that is bad for him and the rest of the world.

Hollywood Agent: Is that it?

You: Yes.

Hollywood Agent: I think we'll pass.

When you aggressively defend something that is not good for you, and the other actors on their stages can see it too (people who are not addicted), you now have to find other actors who share the same opinions as you (the forming of the group at the pub, or the smokers outside at the office).

As actors who can see the truth of addiction find you a bit weak, this leaves you centre stage again, only able to play to a select audience who like your script. Can you follow what I'm trying to get at here? This is the script you have written, and with no changes possible, you plan to follow your script exactly until the day you die.

But what if someone had cleverly tampered with your script without you noticing – in your own handwriting – making you think that this script was all your own work, and you thought you always had to follow it? Fortunately, you are in a position to write a new script, one that the tamperer will not be able to get at. One that allows the actors to interact on a new level without the chains of the old script. One that states:

I acknowledge that I am the most intelligent being on the planet

I will do what is best for my system

I acknowledge that I alone control the script of my life

and in creating a new script, I acknowledge that I am not a slave to my brain's faulty instructions, and will never let my script be tampered with again to bind me to addiction

The stage is now yours:

Hollywood Agent: What's the script about?

You: Well, it's about this guy who suffers from addiction his whole life, defending his right to do something that is bad for him and the rest of the world, but through understanding of himself and the stage he plays on, he comes to understand how the life he has been defending, was never based in reality, and how once he had made a personal commitment to himself to only do good things for his system – a system he acknowledged as being the most advanced system on the planet, he transcended addiction.

Hollywood Agent: Is that it?

You: Yes.

Hollywood Agent: I'll definitely buy that!

[Back to Index](#)

Addiction 2

1. *Being abnormally tolerant to and dependent on something that is psychologically or physically habit-forming (especially alcohol or narcotic drugs)*
2. *An abnormally strong craving*

So, am I still in a state of addiction? Have I taken personal responsibility for my system, one I acknowledge is the most advanced on the planet? The truth is, unless you drink so much that you poison yourself, or overdose on drugs, or get lung cancer from smoking, you will probably manage to trickle on in life, happily addicted, without severe health problems.

Even those of you who are addicted at the moment, may eventually decide to quit all addictive substances, although it might take a health scare and a doctor to tell you that if you don't quit smoking/drinking/drugs, you will die. That's normally enough to get you, the most advanced being on the planet, to gain insight – which is knowledge – of yourself, your malfunctioning brain, and revolt in such a way that the change is instantaneous.

This is incredible isn't it? That only the fear of death, which is the end of all life, is enough to motivate us to do something that is good for our system. Even someone who believes in an afterlife would not be so stupid as to let themselves die before it was time; especially if it meant a slow and painful death.

You see, we're not good at handling pain are we? Remember the example of the hangover in addiction 1, where we are actively calculating how much pleasure we want to buy (consumption) and balancing it with how much we are willing to pay (withdrawal)? This means we know we can handle the after-effects of six pints of beer, twenty cigarettes, or one gram of cocaine, but we know that if we cross that boundary, we are going to suffer – and suffer we will.

I know when I've had enough of anything, but the brain keeps on demanding just a little bit more. Remember that this part of your brain knows nothing of suffering, it's just there for the good times. But you know it the next day, don't you? This is where the promises to yourself start, isn't it?

*I'll never drink again
I'll never touch drugs again
I'll never smoke again*

Do you recognise yourself here? I know I do. After every excess comes a realization – an insight. We know we've crossed the line on how much pain we can handle, and so we're ready to promise anything to make it stop! You tell yourself how stupid you are, and what an idiot you are! "That's it! I'm going to get healthy, eat properly, go to bed earlier, and start doing exercise." Isn't this amazing? I think it is. What you are actually doing is making your personal commitment to yourself to acknowledge that you are the most advanced, intelligent being on the planet and that you will do what is best for your system. Remember when we stated:

***I acknowledge that I am the most intelligent being on the planet
I will do what is best for my system***

You are clear in the moment. You are aware of yourself, and you are being true to yourself at the same time. Right now, you have freed yourselves from addiction. You are one hundred percent free. But what happens the next day, and the next? Something very strange! The better you feel, the more the body, which has also become addicted, starts craving, as the body is actually requiring these substances to continue its "normal" functioning.

Even though you have made your personal commitment to yourself, something else has started making demands, and this time they're a lot stronger than the brain's demands. So what we need to understand is that when the whole system becomes addicted, the personal commitment you have made will not normally be enough for most people to get over what is just the pain of withdrawal from the substances.

You will need to be willing to accept the pain as the sum cost of years of pleasure

Depending on the substances taken, and the volume consumed, you may notice slight discomfort up to full-blown withdrawal, which can be very unpleasant. These are physical withdrawal symptoms, and are unavoidable. You must be willing to accept that you will be in discomfort for anything up to about a week or two – but that's all! That's not too heavy a price to pay for say, twenty years of smoking, five years of hard

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

drugs, or fifteen years of alcohol consumption, is it? A harder price to pay would be an early death, or another twenty years of wishing you could stop!

What we must all remember, is that this cost of physical withdrawal has the pay off of years more healthy living, not clouded by the need to satisfy your addictions, and freedom to make your life your own. Your stage will no longer be occupied by the addicted actor, you will see yourself differently, and other people will see you differently too.

Take a look at what's in store!

You will not feel nervous about having to take a long flight in case you can't smoke.

Your skin will look younger.

You won't have to worry about going out in case you can't smoke marijuana.

You will have different friends. People who like you for who you are and not because you get drunk at the pub.

Your clothes will not smell any more.

Your breath will not smell bad, and the staining on your teeth and fingers will begin to disappear.

You won't be afraid of driving in case you are over the alcohol limit.

You won't waste money on things that are not good for your system.

Your brain will start to feel more awake, free from the constant need to supply the body with addictive substances above all else.

Your system will be calmer and more balanced. Free from the withdrawal feelings that happen all the time.

You won't be motivated to get a fix in the middle of the night, you will sleep more soundly.

You will wake up earlier in the morning; you will not need a cigarette before you "wake up properly."

You will begin to see how addicted other people are.

You will begin to smell things more clearly.

You will taste food more.

You will be able to exercise more.

Above all, you will be free!

At the same time as physical withdrawal, you will have the brain telling you to smoke, drink, inject, snort – you name it, it will try anything. It is your body's messenger and it is communicating with you in your voice. This is nothing to be scared of, although it will feel unpleasant. When you see the addiction, it will back down and your voice will become fainter.

You will know when physical withdrawal has come to an end. You will not feel so nervous or anxious; your stomach will calm down, and your blood pressure and heart rate will regularise. In short, you will stop craving the drug. But the faulty brain will continue to be watching for opportunities to hook you back in.

Remember, once the brain has tasted pleasure, it won't let it go without a fight. The thing to remember is, you're through it; you are free, and as long as you remember your personal commitment to yourself:

"I acknowledge that I am the most intelligent being on the planet

I will do what is best for my system"

...you will never again feel the need to turn to addictive substances for pleasure. After all you've gone through, what's a bit of stress at work, or a problem in your relationship, or money worries? These are genuine issues to be addressed by you, not some lame excuse by your brain to start feeding itself with toxins again. Of course, you could choose not to go through the short withdrawal period, not pay the cost of the pleasure – as you are the most advanced system on the planet, and able to make decisions on your own – but before you do, try to see who is making the decision...

You, or your addicted brain?

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Remember, the addiction doesn't care what happens to the system. It exists independently and will exploit any situation to get what it wants. You are just the servant who picks up the glass, the servant who lights the cigarette, the servant who injects the heroin. You are the most intelligent, sophisticated being on the planet, can you honestly tell me you *don't* want to do what's best for your system?

Support for deep addictions: Action right now

Of course, for some of you this will not be enough. I know some people who are trapped in deep addiction, people who really want to stop doing what they know to be bad for their system. They really want to stop, but they just can't. They go to doctors, counselling, detox centres, they try everything; they even move country, but end up the same. They are desperate, but their brains and bodies keep demanding more and more, and will force them to do anything to get what they want.

The problem with addictive substances, is they cost money. Real cash is necessary, and the deeper you descend into addiction, the harder it is to maintain a normal life. Keeping a regular job becomes harder, and more and more money is required to satisfy the addiction. You start stealing, or perhaps engage in violent robberies; you will do anything to get the substance. Then you're caught. Up to court you go, where you may be sentenced to prison; where for a few pounds, someone will smuggle your substances in for you!

I empathise with all of you who are really suffering in this way, although I don't feel sorry for you. You are feeding the addiction by lifting up your glass to your mouth, by smoking, or by injecting. There is no hidden force controlling you. This is why it is vitally important to free yourself right now. This is the time to act.

For some, it's their circle of friends, their lack of money, family problems, and lack of employment that keeps them addicted; and for others, it's their circle of friends, their abundance of money, the perfect family, or their high stress job. Come on! Aren't you noticing a pattern here? Everybody gives a different reason for being addicted, always giving a reason why we should feel sorry for them. Poor things. But you all have one thing in common – the addiction. The addiction that exists independently to anything else. You see, if you are an unemployed smoker, and you stand next to a wealthy banker who smokes, what do you have in common? Smoking. If you drink because you are upset you have no job, what makes you different to the man who drinks because he can't handle the stress from too much highly paid work?

The need for alcohol drugs or cigarettes acts independently of any emotion

When you consume these substances, you are only fulfilling the need to satisfy a craving. No matter how you dress it up, you want the substance for the substances sake, and *not* to alleviate painful emotions. If I told you that going for a five kilometre run would help alleviate emotional pain, through the generation of endorphins, would you do it? No of course you wouldn't! Why? Because you want the substance.

Admit you want the substances now, and move forward. Stop deluding yourselves that you have to keep drinking or smoking because you're so stressed. Yes, stress exists, but you deal with stress by addressing the root cause of the stress; not covering it up with a fast acting painkiller. You are addicted to the feeling; the emotion of your substances, how they makes you feel, and how you wish you always felt like that. You may have problems which need to be worked through, but worked through they must be – not locked up.

Addictive substances make you feel good; you wouldn't take them if they didn't, would you? If cigarettes made you stressed, would you smoke them? If alcohol made you depressed, would you drink it? If marijuana made you paranoid, would you smoke it? But did you know that these substances can have exactly this effect on the system?

Stop taking the substances. Write down how you feel. Make a plan to do something better when you no longer have the substance addiction. Talk to someone. Feel how you feel.

In the beginning it's hard. You feel nervous, empty, shaky, anxious, nauseous, or sleep deprived. Hey, these substances are really good for you – just look what doom and gloom they offer you when you stop taking them! They are punishing you for daring to live a life without them. But you can.

Remember this. *You* are the most advanced, intelligent being on the planet, no one can take that away

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

from you, and no matter how hard it is, you are doing the best for your system by stopping taking these substances. Imagine now, a free you; free of the need to consume addictive substances. Now imagine a powerful you; one who doesn't feel afraid every time someone offers him a cigarette, a pint of beer, or a joint. Imagine smelling the air as you have never smelled it before, tasting food as you have never tasted it before, and enjoying life as it was meant to be enjoyed – without addiction.

Start now.

[Back to Index](#)

Addiction 3

1. *Being abnormally tolerant to and dependent on something that is psychologically or physically habit-forming (especially alcohol or narcotic drugs)*
2. *An abnormally strong craving*

I want to discuss another type of addiction with you; one that is not as easily identifiable as the ones covered in the previous sections. You see, in my mind we have the capacity to addict ourselves to anything, and this is one thing we really need to be careful of. I will continue to use the example of the faulty brain, as I believe that no healthily functioning brain would wish to crave a specific substance day after day, especially one that does not assist the system in any useful manner.

*What do you think you need to have a healthy body and mind?
How about coffee, chocolate, biscuits, sweet, sugary soft drinks?
What about cars, sex, ice cream, tv, computer games, or shopping?*

Either nature thinks it's funny watching all these supposed super-intelligent beings running around desperately addicted, or somewhere along the long road of evolution, a mistake was made; one that is now costing us dearly in freedom. Look at the previous examples. How many of us indulge in at least half of them? I will take a guess at a lot, especially in the developed world, where money has enabled us to indulge ourselves as often as we want.

Why do you think we allow ourselves to be addicted?

One word: Pleasure

That's right. All things we consider good, worthwhile activities to spend our time on these days, are centred on one part of the brain: The pleasure part. Not the pleasure that comes from running a marathon, but easy pleasure – one you don't have to move too far to get, one where the cost is low, and the pleasure is great! Because your brain loves pleasure!

I would like to involve you in a little experiment, if that's all right? I'd like you all to visualize this scenario, if you will, and remember this is not a criticism of a specific lifestyle. I would like to explore how you think about these things, that's all.

It's 6.00 am as you crawl out of bed, have a nice hot shower, dress for work, and go downstairs. As you turn on the tv whilst preparing your breakfast, you drink a nice strong freshly brewed coffee, and hear the weatherman giving a grim forecast of the day to come.

"It's gonna be a cold one today, with a strong chance of snow."

"Oh, that's so inconvenient!" you think to yourself.

"Make sure the children wrap up warm today, honey. I've got to go to work," you shout upstairs to your wife.

Breakfast finishes, and you put on your big jacket, say goodbye to the wife and kids, and jump into your car. Ahh, it's so nice to get into your car on a cold day. You get the heater going, and whilst looking out at the wild weather outside, you turn the dial on your six-speaker cd player to your favourite music. Start the car and the two litre engine roars into life and off you drive, away from your suburban home to the city. After parking in the underground car park, you catch the lift to your warm climate controlled office.

Meanwhile, your wife is busy getting herself and the children ready. A quick splash of french perfume, and once her jacket's on jumps into her four-wheel drive family bus, and gets the heater on. At the end of the drive, she gives the nanny a ring on her mobile to remind her to turn on the in-car dvd screens for the kids, so they don't get bored on their way to school; and peacefully, she heads down to her own office. She's got a couple of meetings in town, and they're only a short distance apart, but it makes sense to drive between them as it's freezing today.

Lunchtime comes, you meet your wife outside her office and drive to a nice seafood restaurant, where you have a terrine of wild salmon and tiger prawns, and she has lobster bisque, followed by red snapper served with fresh asparagus for both; and for dessert – fresh strawberries.

After lunch you both return to your offices, where you deal with emails, and have several meetings; whilst at your wife's office, she is briefed on an important business trip she has to make next month (she also makes a note on her laptop to make sure the nanny has organised the children's after-school activities whilst

she will be away).

It's now about 7.00 pm, and it's snowing heavily, as you make your way home. Your wife arrived a short while ago, and has ordered a takeaway for everyone, as it's the nanny's night off. You take a nice relaxing shower after your hard day, get changed, and retire downstairs, where you open a nice bottle of red wine to share with your wife. Soon afterwards, the doorbell rings, and your takeaway arrives.

After dinner, you and your wife retire in front of your new plasma tv with the latest hollywood blockbuster, whilst the kids are upstairs playing the latest computer game. A couple of hours pass, the kids are in bed, and you retire upstairs to your ultra cosy feather down duvet, and fall gently asleep...

How many of you live a life similar to this?
More importantly, how many of you aspire to this life?

What is it about this life that attracts you? This family obviously has money, nice cars, and the parents both hold high positions in their companies. They dine out often, the children go to private school, they have a well furnished house, with all the latest gadgets, buy all the latest fashions, and like the finer things in life.

Let's go into this shall we? We are not going to discuss lifestyle choices, why money is important, why a good job is important, or whether it is environmentally sound to be running two cars, or even if takeaway food is a good or bad thing. What we want to be discussing is the brain's addiction to these things.

Most of you would think that there is nothing wrong in having a lifestyle like this. You're very busy, and anything that can make your life a little easier is not a bad thing; and anyway, you've worked hard to get where you are today. You didn't have this kind of comfort when you were young, and you want to make sure your children have a better chance in life than you had. Stated like this, I think everyone would have to agree that it's not a bad thing.

"Where's the harm in it? I lead a peaceful life, I keep myself to myself, I always pay my taxes, I donate to charity twice a year, I do voluntary work when I can, I always give to down and outs on the streets, and I help out at my children's school."

"Show me why having a nice comfortable life is a bad thing!"

At this point, you would probably be angry that I even suggested such a thing; "How dare he challenge me! I work really hard and what I choose to spend my time and money on is nobody's business but mine!" But we are not discussing whether a comfortable lifestyle is a good or bad thing. We are discussing how the brain can become addicted, not only to alcohol, but to a lifestyle; to a flat panel tv, or airconditioning in your car.

Let me ask you a question, what does a comfortable lifestyle and alcohol have in common? Most of you would say nothing. On the surface that appears a correct assumption to make, but on closer examination, they specifically have two things in common:

1. They both act on the brain's pleasure centres

Just think how excited you were when you bought that new car, all shiny, with brand new leather seats, and multi stack cd changer. Now think how much you enjoyed that beer after a hard day at work.

2. They both have withdrawal symptoms

Just think about having to sell your nice shiny car, because you couldn't afford the repayments any more as you had been made redundant. Now think about how you feel the morning after too many drinks, as the hangover hits.

Withdrawal. That is the key word. You like the pleasure of having the beer, the coffee, the car, the leather sofa, the swimming pool, the designer clothes, the shoes, the exotic fruits, or the exquisite meats; but what happens when you can't have them anymore? A feeling of loss, a feeling of emptiness, the same kind the body has on withdrawal from narcotic drugs. When your body and your mind get too used to something, they end up not being able to live without it. Of course, we all know that none of these things are necessary for

the healthy functioning of the system, but once we've tasted them, it's so, so hard to give them up, isn't it? Remember the alcohol addict?

"I don't need it, I just want it! I deserve it, I've worked hard today! If I want, I will go for a drink, no one's going to tell me what to do." Well, how about "I don't need a new tv, I just want one," or to be more exact: "I don't want a new tv, I need one!"

When we are talking about possessions that make us happy, we seem to change it around to "need" not "want" (as want sounds greedy, and need sounds as if you have no compulsion to buy the tv but the other one's a bit old so it *needs* replacing), whereas the man drinking wants to convince us he doesn't need a drink, he just wants one! An interesting thing is happening here; do you see? "I don't want a new car, I *need* a new car." "I don't want a new sofa, I *need* one."

*I don't want to have to buy the new mp3 player, but the old one doesn't hold enough songs, so I **need** a new one.*

Do you really need a new mp3 player? Do you need it for the healthy functioning of the system? No, it just makes us happy to have a new one, especially as it's all shiny. It's the latest gadget to enhance your life! I know what it feels like to buy something new; you know what you want, you go to the shop. You see it, you touch it: "Oh it feels good, soon, it will be mine! It looks so nice, so colourful, so shiny; not like the old scratched one." You reach for your wallet, complete the sale, and it's yours!

Ahh, pure pleasure...

And the advertisers know it. They know how to make you buy their goods; they know what you want, and they use psychology to help you get it. They know you buy for pleasure, and they use images and messages that appeal to the pleasure centres of the brain (and you thought it was your idea to buy the brand new all singing all dancing, multi-format, video playing, portable music player). They appealed to your friends' pleasure centres and even if they didn't get to you, they know that peer pressure will soon have you shuffling along to the shops, to splash out your hard earned pennies on the same (or better) product! Bit scary isn't it?

So let us just say for now, that anything which has a positive effect on the brain's pleasure centres is liable to cause an addiction, and our brain lets us know that now we have it, we must not let it go. It makes us happy, and to have it withdrawn would cause us psychological pain.

Imagine if you will, a child with the latest toy. The child is naughty, and to punish him you take away the toy. Oh, how that child will cry! Now imagine yourself with the latest toy, and somebody steals it! Oh, how you cry (on the inside; after all you are an adult now).

The interesting thing is, that if you've never been exposed to anything that stimulates the pleasure centres of the brain, you will never become addicted. Do you follow? If I have never tasted alcohol and no one I know has either, will I seek it out, just because it brings pleasure? Does my brain know about it before I have been told that it has pleasurable effects?

If I have never seen a tv do I want one? If I have never seen an mp3 player will I crave it? Will I be so desperate to have a cigarette if my peers had not convinced me to try it? We are hard-wiring ourselves for pleasure. Everything in life is about satisfying this superficial desire for pleasure. I am not here to criticise you for your choices, merely to illuminate them. The reasons for this desire are many, and we will go into this in detail in other topics.

Action now

Be aware of the feeling you get; that little flutter of excitement in your stomach, the feeling of anticipation of pleasure, and watch yourself when you go to buy something new. Now step outside yourself for a moment, just before you sip that first alcoholic drink of the day, or smoke that first cigarette. I am sure you will understand what I have been talking about. Now try to stop yourself from drinking, buying, or smoking and your brain will be on the defence straight away.

“No one’s going to tell me what I can or can’t have. I want it and I’m going to have it.”

[Back to Index](#)

Advertising

1. *A public promotion of some product or service*
2. *The business of drawing public attention to goods and services*

Buy it now!
It's exciting!
It's new!
Buy it now!
Everyone's buying it!

Let's face it, advertising runs our lives now. Everywhere you turn, from the poorest countries, to the richest, some company is advertising something. Advertising is now a slick, mega-money industry, and the advertisers want *you* to spend *your* money on the product they are advertising. They want *you* to buy into the concept they have created, and they want *you* to spend *your* money – that's all it's about. However nicely it's packaged, it's all about you and your money. You've earned it. Now spend it.

Let's start by talking about what sort of products get advertised most often. There's cars, cosmetics, fashion, insurance, soft drinks and fast food. Then there's credit cards, home do-it-yourself, holidays, and consumer electronics, amongst others; all things you don't need, but are pushed as must-haves. There's usually a smiling family, so happy they have just bought their new 4x4 off-road vehicle to run the kids to school in; or the immaculate model, who is smiling broadly, because she has just bought a new anti-wrinkle cream, just in case she looks like she has aged by one day!

How about the "cool and funky" advertising for new consumer gadgets that have smiling people playing with game stations, pc's, or mp3's? Cool music, cool people, cool products! And there's always *lots* of smiling. After all, you wouldn't expect the advertisers to put someone on tv who looked miserable after buying a new car, would you?

Forgive me for saying, but isn't this all an illusion (*the act of deluding; deception by creating illusory ideas*)? We buy into all this, because of the way it is presented to us by clever marketers, who just happen know what makes us tick! They know that peer pressure, and the need to maintain a high status, will keep you buying the latest products. Whatever it costs, you will get it. Your friends have it, your children want it, your colleagues need to see you have it; you want your wife to be seen wearing it.

Face it, all this is just for show. Do you agree, or could you say you have to have the products advertised on tv? Do you think you could survive, or even live more healthily without drinking sweet carbonated drinks every day, or eating cardboard hamburgers? Do you think you need that new car? How about the specially formulated shampoos with peptides, or that new platinum credit card that's sure to impress your friends with the £10,000 credit limit?

Doesn't all this make you want to scream? Probably not, but it makes me want to scream, because I can see it for what it is – a way to addict humans to consumer goods, and make them compete with each other for the highest status points – nothing more.

None of these products are helping the world become a better place. None of these products are stopping violence, reducing hunger, or helping educate children in poor countries; although I'm sure all these companies have foundations, or help children's charities. After all, it makes them look good, and they only have to build an orphanage somewhere for everyone to say, "See! Look at the good work they are doing, you shouldn't criticise them. They are a decent caring company, even if the products they create don't do any good."

You may think I am just a bit of a complainer, but hasn't everything been hijacked by advertisers? It's impossible to watch sport, without a million brand names in your face. You can't watch a programme on tv, without it being interrupted ten times for an advertising break; the internet is littered with advertising, and even the cinema shows them before the film starts. One thing I only recently realised was that when you buy clothing, you are advertising the company for free, under the pretext of "fashion." Everything is ruled by companies advertising their products, and now there is so much money in sponsorship, that most sports would crumble if the advertisers pulled out.

We live in a world, surrounded not by natural sounds, but by the constant bombardment of advertising slogans. Buy, buy, buy, they scream (in the nicest possible way). They entice you, they tempt you, they offer you something for nothing, they offer two for one specials, on and on, buy, buy, buy! "We know you don't need it, but you *should* have it. Everyone's got one, why haven't you? They're fantastic, they'll make your life sooo much better. It'll be an instant improvement, go on, you know you want one!" On radio and on television; in the newspapers and in the magazines; in the cinemas, at the sports stadium; in the toilets, on the train, on the plane, on the bus, in the shops, on the packet... you can't get away. It's a full on visual and audio assault on the senses: "You can't escape, you *will* hear our message, you *will* see our message..."

Close your eyes...

And shhhhhhhh, all quiet... Shhhhhhhh... You're on an island in the middle of nowhere, with nothing but the sound of the ocean gently lapping the shore, the distant call of the sea birds lulls you to sleep; you feel the warm wind brush your face. You feel the grains of sand run through your fingers, and all the while, your body feels lighter and softer... Ahh, that's better, let's be quiet for a while. Let's turn off the tv if it's on, or turn off the music, or put down the paper. Let's just sit and be quiet, without the constant noise, and close your eyes gently... This is how we should be feeling all the time.

Nature is calmness, and although it can be fierce at times, the noise doesn't grate like the sound of the ad-man whining, trying to get us to buy something. Why should we listen to him? What right does he have to invade my home, my car, or my head? If only I could close my eyes and not be exposed to propaganda, for that's what it is. Unfortunately, I cannot close my eyes, for I need them to see, and I cannot close my ears, for I need them to hear.

So why do we put up with it? We just accept that we are bombarded at all times by this invasive noise. This pleading voice, attempting to appeal to our ego and our vanity. All for what? To sell some crummy shampoo, a box with four wheels to get you from A to B, a game console to avoid you having to talk to anyone or go outside, or a fast food meal destined to make you slothful and unhealthy? The advertisers may even take me to court for slandering their good products in this topic!

Remember, it's all about money – your money. They exist because of you. It is your fault people are subjected to advertising all the time. Why? Because they do appeal to your ego, they do appeal to your vanity, and you believe everything they say, and buy their products. Do you see? If we all stopped buying their products, they would crumble and fade away, and there would be no need to advertise any more.

We need to stand up and say, "We don't want your products, and we don't want to listen to your endless self-promotion," but you won't will you? You're much too comfortable with all of their products that make your lifestyle just "perfect." You won't complain; in fact, you kind of like hearing all the latest offers on the tv or through the junk mail system. You like it, because they have addicted you to consumerism. They own you, hook, line, and sinker! You're theirs to sell to, at any time of the day or night; they know you bought last time and they know you'll buy again.

In fact, they know everything about you. They know your spending habits, what you earn, where you live, what job you do, and *you* gave them all that information. *You* are responsible for the mass of advertising we are subjected to every day. *You* just can't stop buying. The more money you get, the more you buy, and the more you buy, the more they want you to buy. It's a never ending cycle. Your children see something advertised on the tv, so they pressure you to into buying it for them. You want an easy life, so you buy it for them. Your child says, "michael at school has a new pair of sports trainers, so I need them too." You don't want your child to be the odd one out, so you buy them the trainers. And on and on.

You 0 – Advertisers 1

Unless you say no; and it takes a strong man (or woman) to reject what is being sold to you; to close your eyes and ears to advertising, and realise what they are selling is an illusion. Their products won't make you happy; they won't make your life better, although you will feel the short term excitement from making the purchase. But as soon as it's home, the advertisers know that it will be an anti-climax, and you will be rushing out again to seek the high of buying. It's the same with every product. First the advert, then the decision to buy, then the purchase, then the waiting, then the excitement of delivery, then opening the purchase, then using it for the first time, then several weeks later, the thrill dies down and you forget you were ever excited about it!

Watch yourself in action, see if the thrill of making the purchase is much greater than the purchase itself.

So what is to be done with advertising? How do we get back to a world where we had silence when we wanted it – visual and audio? Where people weren't forcing us to buy things at every turn of the head? Well, there is no going back. Advertising is here to stay, and it will only get more prolific.

The sponsors are already crawling all over our society with their (your) money, ready to throw it at anything they think people will pay attention to. Maybe your school will be sponsored by a soft drink

company (but will only continue funding the school if the children drink at least four bottles of fizzyade each per day). Maybe your house will start to have advertising on it, in order to reduce the cost of the mortgage and bring in some much needed money. Maybe your car will have sponsors logos, if they promise to pay for your fuel. Wherever you turn, there will be advertisers ready to hand out wads of cash, just for the right to put their message somewhere people can see it. If you don't believe me, just take a look around you. It's happened already.

Most of us now live in free societies, where people have the right to free speech and the right to go about their business without interference from any government source, so advertisers would argue that they are only exercising that right; but that doesn't mean you and I have to put up with it. You may not be convinced about advertisers taking over our lives, and I respect your right to challenge anything I have said here, or anywhere else in this book. But all I ask of you, is to be aware of what is going on, and ask the question why companies put so much money into advertising?

You may think advertising is harmless, and that people have the ability to make up their own minds when it comes to buying things, but let me ask you one question: If large firms didn't advertise their products all the time, do you think people would buy them? Do you think people would buy into the need to have these products just because they look cool, or because people on the advert look like they are enjoying themselves (whether it be with a burger, a cola, or a credit card)?

So why do we buy into this illusion, by buying products we clearly don't need, from these large companies? And make no mistake, it is large companies who are doing the bulk of the advertising and sponsorship in the world. No small companies could ever afford to pay for the kind of advertising campaigns put on by fashion, food, and car companies. First, there's the huge cost of producing tv and radio ads; then there's the cost of paying for slots to have them aired. These advertisers are making a major investment, and they're betting you are going to part with your hard-earned cash very soon.

I want to know what happened to us; I want to know why we have lost the ability to be individuals, and independent thinkers, and why we are so easily influenced. At one time I believed that these advertisers were using clever psychology to trap us, but it seems they only have to appeal to our basic insecurities about fitting in, and our need to be part of the in-crowd (albeit a crowd created by them), and our need to show off to others. Of course, the advertisers are ready with their slogans just to help you make that all-important choice in your life about yourself.

If you're not wearing Brand X Lash Extensions this summer you're a nobody

Everybody's wearing Brand X shoes why aren't you?

Wanna catch that special man? You're going to need a special perfume! Buy Perfume X

Wanna get tough and macho outdoors this summer? You'll need a tough and macho car to match. Buy our new Macho Man Brand 4x4

Only losers don't buy Cola X

One thing we haven't talked about here is that the only things you see advertised on tv are fluffy consumer products. You never see independent advertisements talking about real issues and getting people to act. No broadcaster will ever play an advert that talks about cruelty to animals, cruelty to humans etc. they have too much to lose. Their station is funded by the advertisers, who would pull the funding if adverts were being shown that they felt were detrimental to their business.

Would a burger chain keep advertising on a station which also had adverts for vegetarianism? Would they carry adverts for groups trying to stop deforestation caused by mass grazing, for these burger chains? Of course they wouldn't. First, they get much more money from the burger chain, and second, they want advertising that is family friendly (i.e. fluffy, doesn't offend anyone), and make sure that no one gets upset with graphic images of animal slaughter in the middle of the mainstream tv soaps. Light entertainment, that's what the tv stations provide, and they want light advertising that fits in with this policy. Only the sorry thing is, the products they produce – although innocuous on the surface, and glossy on the ad – are actually causing more harm than they let on.

Think Cars: Think Environment – Petroleum addiction

Think Fast Food: Think Health – Packaging – Global food production

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Think Credit cards: Think Debt and Poverty
Think Cosmetics: Think Obsession with Self-Image – Animal testing

I could go on, but I would like you to think about this for yourselves. Let's see if you can really start to close your eyes and ears to the global advertisers who control our lives and what we buy. And *not* to buy into gloss and schmooze that is served up every day.

Life isn't about buying the latest consumer products. Who cares if your colleagues or your friends have got them? You will be different, but in a positive way. People will respect you for not giving in to propaganda. When you have got over your addiction to adverts, you will notice that suddenly you are free. I found this out myself, and I was happy I no longer had to get the latest things in order to be part of the "in-crowd." It didn't matter; it was all an illusion anyway. An illusion created to make me think I needed these things, when in fact I never needed any of them at all.

One day, a company may advertise something we actually need to get on in life, but until that day, my eyes and ears are firmly closed. Whether I'm in the city, on the train, listening to the radio, or even watching tv; whenever the ads come on, I'll be back in the peace and quiet of my desert island, replacing the voice-over man with the sound of the waves and the sea birds. Try it. Remember. If you don't buy their products, there will be no point in advertising them.

[Back to Index](#)

Agriculture

1. *A large-scale farming enterprise*
2. *The practice of cultivating the land or raising stock*

I sit here in my small room writing, looking out over the island and the vegetable garden that has been created, at the retreat where I am volunteering. Meanwhile, my first attempts at agriculture are reaching fruition! For the past week, I have been nurturing a small tray of cress seeds, which are apparently very tasty in salad. I have been keeping the compost moist as instructed, and was happy to see most of them germinate (*cause to grow or sprout*).

They grew slowly but steadily, gradually shooting upwards at the heady pace of about two millimetres per day, until finally the green tops of the cress started to show. This morning I have checked them again, and most of them are ready to be harvested so I will pick them and add them to my salad for lunch!

I know agriculture is supposed to be large-scale farming, and that my cress seeds will be gone in less than one serving, but I was amazed watching them grow. Here was life being created before my eyes, and anyone who has ever grown their own fruit and vegetables from seed will know that it is a wonderful process, of Man working with nature, and trying to protect the seed from predators (without using pesticides to kill them, I might add).

Sport lovers may see it as a game; like playing cat and mouse with the predators. Can our lettuces survive the dreaded slugs in a race against time, us versus them? The final whistle blows: *Lettuces 28 – Slugs 10*. Not a bad result. After all, slugs have to eat too, and for all you slug haters out there, try to remember one thing; all things on this earth have a purpose. They are neither good nor bad, that is merely subjective.

Farmers, who engage in large-scale production, also have a one-sided view of pests (*any unwanted and destructive insect or other animal that attacks food or crops or livestock etc.*). They see anything that comes between them and their money as a pest, but nature is just doing its job, feeding all living creatures on the earth. If you are someone who thinks because something eats your crops, it must die, then you have a seriously distorted view of the world and what reality really is.

All over the world, farmers are spraying their crops with deadly chemicals that kill everything in their path. Why? Because these “pests” come between the farmer and his profits. Do you think he is a humanitarian, growing vegetables etc. for the good of the world, and he wants to feed the starving, or do you think he just wants to feed his own pockets? People may take issue with this, but let’s talk here. Farmers are not the natural guardians of the planet and feeders of the hungry. They are in it for a couple of reasons: (a) their father was a farmer before them, and (b) they are looking to make money.

Money rules agriculture. There is no compassion in large-scale farming. At the start of this topic, I was talking about the magic of watching a seed germinate, but farmers have no time for such quaint ideas. They are interested in “maximising yields” and “maximising returns.” Things that get in their way are called pests. You may dislike this analogy, but isn’t this the same way a dictator gets what he wants? If the people are not conforming, he kills them. If someone disagrees or challenges him, he kills them. Well, the slugs and insects are challenging the farmer. He plants seeds. They eat them. He kills them. Thanks for your compassion farmer!

But before we get carried away with lynching all the farmers who use chemicals in agriculture, let’s step back in time; to a time when we hunted and gathered all our food. Back then, life was tough. There was no time for anything else in the world; we spent all our time looking for food. If we were still doing that, I would not be sitting at a desk, writing on a computer, with a cup of tea by my side, in a warm room, looking out at a windy wet day through double glazing! I’d still be out there looking for food. Do you understand?

Without the progress, which resulted in agriculture being established, all the other things couldn’t have happened. If everyone is out looking for food, who is going to have time to design a house to keep out the elements, or invent electricity, or the telephone, or indeed a rocket to go to the moon (or not, if you believe the conspiracy theories). We’d all still be out there foraging, taking our chances. I know where I’d rather be, don’t you?

So before we all start criticising farmers, let’s give our thanks to those people who developed agriculture all those years ago, which allowed Man to become a specialist. No longer was everyone involved in the gathering of food; now just one group of specialists (farmers) would be involved in the large-scale growing of food required to feed the new cities. Our farmers are descendants of these early pioneers, so let us give thanks to them also for pursuing a career which is – for want of a better word – “challenging.”

It’s pretty hard to make ends meet when you’re a farmer. It’s a business like everything else these days,

and is subjected to free market pressures. You may want forty pence a lettuce, but if your customer wants to buy twenty thousand, and he only wants to give you fifteen pence a lettuce, what are you going to do? No one else will take that number of lettuces, so you try to negotiate, and eventually give in.

The thing about farming, is that it is a long process, and vegetables don't grow overnight, so the farmer has to nurture his crops with water and fertiliser, and stop other animals and insects from eating the crops. If his crops are decimated, he won't get his money, and he won't be able to eat. It's catch 22.

So what happens? A nice chemical company comes along and offers to help him maximise his crop yields. They will grow better, and will be more resistant to pests. What is he going to do? He accepts their offer. He needs to have a successful crop. The people are relying on him having a successful crop so they can eat. If the crops fail everywhere (and we couldn't import anything) we would eventually starve to death. You can still see it happening all over the world. Crops fail, followed by famine, followed by a desperate attempt by the international charitable organisations to save millions of people starving to death.

Don't get me wrong, pesticides help. They stop known pests from destroying crops, which saves the farmer's livelihood and feeds the people. It all seems like a good idea, doesn't it? So why are people starting to buy organic now? Organic (*of or relating to foodstuff grown or raised without synthetic fertilizers or pesticides or hormones*) vegetables are a lot harder to grow, as they aren't resistant to pests and disease. The yields are lower, and they have a shorter shelf life. It all seems difficult for the poor farmer, who is, after all, not in business to save the world, just to make a living. That must be remembered before we criticise. If you want to criticise, try to make a living in agriculture, and you will see how difficult it really is.

"The consumer has been empowered," go the ads, "People don't want chemicals in their foods, they want it naturelle!" This is all very well, but organic food is more expensive to produce than food treated with chemicals, and so costs more at point of sale. People on lower incomes, who spend less of their disposable income on fresh fruit and vegetables, will buy even less fresh food, because it is so expensive. So what is the answer?

My father and his wife have long since been converts to organic produce. Every week they go to the supermarket and buy organic foodstuffs. They believe that if more people buy it, the price will come down. Basic economics, right? But let's look a little more closely at their purchases shall we? Where do their organic products come from? Are they from a British farmer? Have they been sourced locally? No, of course not. They have come from a central distribution point to the supermarket, and if you look at the label, you will notice that actually, most have come from *farawayland*.

So, although the product may not have had any hormones added, or been sprayed chemically, it has been flown or transported over thousands of miles (which uses fuel, and in most cases is not in season locally). This is turning into a complex subject, so you can see why your local farmer is much happier to spray his crops with pesticides and be done with it!

We haven't even started on gm (*genetically modified or genetically engineered crops*) foods yet, as I believe that to be a subject (whether we allow it to be grown or not), that shouldn't even be up for discussion. As humans we know little enough about nature and her processes, so how can we start to use new technologies, that are untested, to change the underlying genetic characteristics of our food? Whatever your argument for gm, it must have a financial motive. It *cannot* be to feed the starving in Africa.

For millions of years we have survived on this planet; sometimes we have gone hungry, sometimes we have had an abundance of food, but nonetheless, the human race has persisted, without pesticides, and without genetic modifications. I don't know why we waste our time having arguments about the ethics of genetically engineering food. It is unnecessary and can only benefit large seed companies.

Over thirteen billion years have passed (if the scientists and evolutionists are to be believed) since the so-called "big bang," where ten billion years after the event, life started on earth, and developed from single celled organisms to the complex organisms we have now, including homo sapiens. The human. You and me. All without interference.

Can you imagine the complex processes that have taken place over the past four billion years? I mean, really imagine? Do you think a species that is driven by greed, desire, and violence has anything to offer nature in the form of scientific advice about plant growing! Please think about this carefully.

Do not be led by governments and company officials singing the praises of gm food. It will not save people from death, it has merely created a corporate dependence in the developing world, and who knows

what damage it will do to us and the environment in the future. Still, the scientists, who are working on it, will be long dead when they suddenly get an “oops” moment, as they have done, so many times in the past.

As we have said in other topics, growing food is big business. It is also a weapon that can be used to make people conform. Revolutions of any kind are easily quelled when you withhold people’s food. This is not talking about there being a great conspiracy to control our food from corporate headquarters, this is about facing reality.

Agriculture has got out of hand. Not only is the west producing too much, there was even a time when some farmers in Europe were being paid not to grow specific produce (myth?). Nonetheless, we, the citizens, are always kept in the dark when it comes to things like agriculture, but as long as we get cheap fruit and vegetables we don’t really care, do we?

We may like to buy organic, which we should be doing all over the world, if we don’t want nasty chemicals sprayed on our fruit and vegetables. We may even buy from a local farm and eat seasonally, but we haven’t addressed the real issue here, and that is compassion.

“Why is compassion important in agriculture?” you may ask. “Vegetables aren’t people, neither is fruit.” But everything is alive, isn’t it? We live on a “living” planet, so we must care for everything on it – from the small worms which aerate the soil that grows our vegetables, to the bees who pollinate the flowers that become the fruit we eat. Everything is part of the natural world. We are not living in isolation, although sometimes we act like it. Think blanket spraying of pesticides. Think shooting animals that get through fences to eat crops.

For us, it’s all about me, me, me. We are not the only species on the planet! There are other species here, and they have as much right to everything on this planet as we do! Does that shock you?

Imagine if we were not the dominant species. How would we feel if we were treated the way we treat animals (from the largest to the smallest). We are a dictatorial species. We decide how it’s going to be, and that’s that. This planet and its resources are for us, and us alone, and when we’ve used this one up we’ll just up and off to another one (we think). I don’t like bringing doom and gloom to these pages, but we really do have to wake up to what we are doing.

We grow so much food and we waste so much as well. What should be a human right is now a multi-billion dollar global industry. Doesn’t this make you sad? We pretend to care so much, yet we care so little.

Remember my little cress seedlings I grew in a pot for the last week? Well I “harvested” them and had them for lunch in my salad. They were delicious, and tasted all the better for having been hand nurtured. But imagine if I had decided to create a farm growing and selling cress as my career. How different would my approach to the cress be? Would I still look after them the same as I had done in my small pot, or would I see the pound signs in front of my eyes, and do anything to make as much money as possible, without a thought for the land, the animals, and the insects that my cress and I share the planet with?

If I applied compassion to my farm, my primary motivation of profit would be replaced by a desire to nurture the land and create healthy sustainable food for the local community, *not* the worldwide export market; that is the domain of the man who lives for profit, not the compassionate farmer.

I am not saying you shouldn’t make a profit by selling your goods. After wages and expenses you need a little left over to reinvest in the business. If you want to run it on a not for profit basis, even better! You can run it like a community scheme, whereby community members volunteer their time, and you employ someone full time to manage the project. All vegetables grown are sold to the community with the money raised going to fund new schemes to help local projects. It’s up to you!

I ask you to think of the satisfaction of being involved at a community level, where growing food for yourselves is the only priority. Suddenly it’s not a career, it’s a fun, creative way to get organic (of course) fruit and vegetables to local people, without the involvement of global chemical and fertiliser companies; without the involvement of the tax office, and without the involvement of other businesses. Just you and the community doing something worthwhile with love and compassion. Am I dreamer?

Is this what you want, or do we once again close off another topic by concluding that no one cares because they’re too lazy, or too busy to care what is happening to their own planet? I will assume for once that there *are* millions of you out there who care. How much you grow is up to you. How you get the land is also up to you. Create a community charity; raise money for the land, ask your council to donate a large

piece of land to this project. Then get it up and running.

There will be ups and downs; crops may fail, but over time you will learn, and you will be able to pass that knowledge on to others. Go for it.

Imagine the satisfaction of sitting down to dinner, knowing you helped create the vegetables you were eating, and that other people all over the community were thinking the same. That may be a dream for me, but wouldn't it make an even more wonderful reality. If you care, then now is the time to act.

You may notice I haven't mentioned animal farming. I have covered the slaughter of animals in other topics, but to finish, I would like to draw your attention to something important. I don't normally like to use statistics, but in this case I feel I have to.

Every day we kill millions and millions of animals for human consumption. That you know. You may also know that we destroy the natural environment (i.e. forests) to create grazing areas for cattle and sheep etc. and you may also know that by everyone just giving up meat for a day you would be saving millions of animal lives, and freeing up land that could be used for growing vegetables. You may also know that you could grow nearly 40,000 pounds of potatoes per acre compared with about 250 pounds of beef, and that over 50% of farms are dedicated to animal production. You may also know that it takes about 5000 gallons of water to produce a pound of beef! You may also know that most of the corn and oats grown, goes to feed livestock.

If we all stopped eating meat, or at least cut down to eating it once a week, the volume of natural resources we would consume would drop to negligible. We use nearly all of our resources and available farming land producing beef and other meats. For what? So you can have a burger, or a lamb chop, and say "Mmmmm, that was tasty."

We are the most intelligent species on the planet, yet we can't seem to do the maths. Eating meat on the scale we are now is killing the planet, and is doing our health no good either. If you care, you will do the research. Investigate the statistics. Don't believe me. But don't just dismiss what I am saying and carry on what you are doing. Unless you don't care of course. But I think you do.

[Back to Index](#)

Alcohol

1. *A liquor or brew containing alcohol as the active agent*
2. *(Intoxicant) A drug that can produce a state of intoxication*

*I drink because I'm happy
I drink to celebrate
I drink when I'm unhappy
I drink to commiserate*

*I drink to your health
I drink to mine
I drink to whatever
I just like wine*

*I drink because I'm old enough
I drink because I can
I drink and drink and drink and drink
Till the day I finally die*

Let's go into this very, very carefully, shall we? This is something so serious that it requires the utmost attention. Alcohol is something so powerful, that it is able to do the following to a human in a short space of time. It makes people kill each other, laugh, feel super-confident, fight, argue, hurt each other, become depressed, fall in love, feel sexy, fall out of love, become jealous, have fun, do things we don't remember the next day, make us sick, makes us take risks, lower our inhibitions, and makes us feel tired and irritable the next day. It can even affect our balance system, our motor controls, and we fall over. This is something so powerful it can have wildly differing effects on the emotions.

Quite a long list for such an innocuous little word of seven characters, isn't it?

Alcohol

This is strong stuff! Now I hear some of you thinking, "I don't drink much, I drink in moderation; I only have the occasional glass of wine with my dinner, just because it tastes nice." But if you don't drink it regularly, why drink it at all? Well, alcohol makes you feel different, doesn't it? Even just one glass of wine, one pint of beer, one shot of vodka. I'm sure nobody who has a stressful day at work goes to a pub or wine bar and orders a pint of water! Do you? I know I wouldn't.

So let's imagine the scenario. You have just driven home through annoying traffic jams, everything at work was stressful, maybe somebody wasn't very nice to you today, or it was hot and you are tired (it happens). So you decide to pop in for a drink on your way home; what are you thinking? What do you imagine when you order your drink, and what does it *feel* like when you take the first sip? "Ahhhhh, that's better!"

You see, alcohol acts quickly as a suppressant of the nervous system, and for that moment, you do feel better, more relaxed; more "normal." But what is alcohol's real purpose? Is it not to block out reality, to numb our emotional pain centres, to distract us from the drudgery of day to day life; to cure us of angry and hurt feelings, and give us a chance to feel better, even for a short moment in time?

All of us work hard in the world, a lot of us work monday to friday, some work weekends as well. And what is the feeling in the general workplace on a friday afternoon, or on your last day before you have a day off? Most people can't wait to get off home to have a drink to "celebrate" the end of the week, to "relax," and to "chill out."

I deserve it!

I remember thinking the same, and I remember having such fun when I was drunk. Oh, I felt on top of the world! I felt confident, attractive, and I was a real show off with the ladies. The next day, I'd have a raging hangover and would be chatting excitedly with the people I was drunk with the night before; about the girl I had slept with, the volume of alcohol we had consumed, who was fighting with who. Oh, did we have a laugh!

We were really cool guys in town; we were jack the lads, we had money, good jobs, all the latest gadgets, nice cars, and we knew what we liked spending our money on... Alcohol. We drank, beer wine and vodka, maybe gin, maybe anything! I was always the party animal; always the last person to leave, always drinking more and more till eventually I either blacked out, or fell over on my wayhome.

How we laughed the next day; oh, it was so funny: "Hey alan, I can't believe you fell over in the road, that was so funny!" And funny it was; we all laughed about the exploits of the night before, until it was time to head home, to suffer the hangover alone.

You see, with every excess, there is a cost, and alcohol is no exception. It dehydrates the body, makes you feel shaky, disrupts your sleep patterns, makes you feel uneasy, sick, tired, and depressed. You feel just terrible! You swear "I'll never drink again." Until the next day, when the hangover's gone, and you conveniently forget the pain of the day before, and head down for a "quick pint" after work. After all, *"I've had a hard day, I deserve it."*

Before we move forward, many of you will be disagreeing, and saying that drinking to excess is generally prevalent in youth culture; that people eventually grow out of it and drink more moderately. But in some

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

cultures people never drink, and in other cultures, such as the ancient aboriginal people of australia (who had never been exposed to alcohol in their entire history until the english introduced it some 200 years ago) it is now proving to be a great social problem. Whatever the for's and against's are of alcohol, I would like to ask you some simple questions which I would like you to consider:

- A. Why do we like alcohol so much?
- B. What is it about alcohol that makes us want to spend our hard earned money on it?
- C. What, given the long list of adverse effects could possibly be our reason for consuming it?
- D. How would you deal with stress at work if alcohol had never been invented?
- E. How do people, who don't drink, "celebrate" or deal with stress and problems?
- F. If it tastes so good, why do children dislike it?

In my mind, alcohol is the great reality concealer. It conceals stress, pain, shyness, anger, hurt, disappointment, and fear amongst others; all of which are normal human emotions; all of which can be expressed correctly, through talking to someone, writing a journal, or evaluating your life yourself. Alcohol isn't about having fun.

We can have great fun when we're not drinking...
Just look at a child and tell me he *needs* to have a drink to have fun.

[Back to Index](#)

Alcoholics Anonymous

- 1. An international organization that provides a support group for persons trying to overcome alcoholism*

This is the only prescribed “cure” for the “disease” of alcoholism. If you are unaware of the organization, I will give you a brief explanation. It is organised into local groups, city by city, where people suffering from “alcoholism” either go, or are sent by the court (for committing certain alcohol related crimes) for treatment.

This is where it gets interesting. Unlike a hospital, where people with psychiatric or physical ailments are treated by medical doctors with years of training; here, there is a “facilitator” who is usually a recovering alcoholic, with no medical training. Everyone sits around in a circle and, if you are new, in order to start the road to recovery, you have to stand up and say the following: “Hello, my name is alan, and I’m an alcoholic.”

At which point people will clap – as acceptance of being an alcoholic is the first step to recovery. You are also told that alcoholism is a chronic and progressive disease for which there is no cure. You will also be told that your only hope of survival is by accepting the 12 step program which involves the following, amongst other things:

Giving up all responsibility for your abuse of alcohol and saying you are powerless over your need to drink.

Handing yourself over to a higher power (god).

Accepting that you will always be in recovery “one day at a time.”

Agreeing to attend group meetings to discuss your alcoholism until you have recovered.

Let’s stop and think about this shall we? Whether you call yourself an alcoholic or not, there are several diseases where there is no cure, amongst them, aids; a disease of such huge magnitude that it is sweeping the globe at an alarming pace. Now, before you challenge me that they are in no way similar, what I am trying to explore with you here is our approach to problems we can’t deal with in society. Can you possibly imagine having to attend a group meeting to overcome aids, which has been verified by the medical society as a real disease?

“Hello, my name is alan, I have aids.”

At which point people will clap, as acceptance is the first step to recovery, and that the only hope of survival is by accepting the 12 step program which involves the following, amongst other things:

Giving up all responsibility for the disease of aids, and saying you are powerless over it.

Handing yourself over to a higher power (god).

Accepting that you will always be in recovery “one day at a time.”

Agreeing to attend group meetings to discuss your aids until you have recovered.

Surely this is laughable; no one in society would accept that going to a meeting to discuss aids would cure you of the disease. You see that the only place you would go to seek treatment would be a hospital; where highly skilled professionals with years of training would give you the care you require.

Now quickly, let’s go back to alcoholics anonymous. An organization credited with curing thousands of people of a disease where no medical intervention is necessary, only belief in god, and we start to see something more interesting. If I was a member of alcoholics anonymous, I’d be scared. Really scared. Scared of god, scared to have another drink in case I died, and scared in case I let my sponsor or the group down. In fact, because I knew I would forever be in recovery (as this is an incurable disease), I’d be scared of life.

There has never been any proof that alcoholism is a disease, although you may disagree; and if you do, go and find out for yourselves! Who are these people who cure imaginary diseases through handing yourself over to god? Seems a bit magical to me.

Why do the courts force you to go to alcoholics anonymous to be cured? Why don’t they send you to a doctor, who will give you a course of tablets to take, or maybe perform an operation? Why, because no one really knows why people drink so much apart from the people drinking. It is purely subjective. In other words, I may think I have a problem with alcohol abuse, but it doesn’t mean I need to hand myself over to god. It means I have to stop drinking.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

The people at alcoholics anonymous would have you believe that until you accept their 12 Step program you will always be a “dry drunk” (meaning that although you were abstaining, you could never be cured). Now I would call that scary, wouldn’t you? Keeping people in fear of themselves? I would also call that not very responsible.

I can hear you saying, “Wait a minute, the abuse of alcohol can be very destructive. Isn’t it a good thing that someone is doing something about it?” So let me ask you an important question: If you realised you had a problem with beating up your wife, would you hand yourself over to god? Maybe, if that is your belief. But would you accept you were powerless to stop raising your hand to her? Would you really? Would you accept it if someone told you that beating up your wife is a chronic disease for which there is no cure? I hope not! After all, it is you doing the beating up; there is no external force. It is *you*, and you alone who are responsible.

Don’t let someone else accept responsibility on your behalf. Every action you take is your personal responsibility.

[Back to Index](#)

Alcoholism

1. *Habitual intoxication; prolonged and excessive intake of alcoholic drinks leading to a breakdown in health and an addiction to alcohol such that abrupt deprivation leads to severe withdrawal symptoms*
2. *An intense persistent desire to drink alcoholic beverages to excess*

For humans, knowing they are powerless over themselves, is to me, a little contradictory. I accept that there are certain diseases of the mind, which left untreated can be serious for the person and society, for example, paranoid schizophrenia (*any of several psychotic disorders characterized by distortions of reality and disturbances of thought and language and withdrawal from social contact*); where cases have been noted of patients acting on delusions, for example, “the man from the tv told me to kill” (*thought control from an external source*), although this is highly uncommon. So I would like to start this topic by asking you several questions:

Are you responsible for drinking, or is it someone else?

Are you under external control?

Who tells you to go and drink? The man from the tv?

Are you delusional? Do you think you may have a form of schizophrenia?

Who picks up the drink? Do you? Did a strange voice in your head tell you to do it?

Do you want the drink?

Can you live without it?

A personal story

For people like me, who used to get drunk a lot – under the guise of fun, or stress relief – it became apparent, many years later that drinking was not serving any external purpose. I was drinking to get drunk, because drunk felt good. The fact is, I was a lot less stressed when I wasn’t drinking, and also a lot happier. “What happened here?” you may ask, “alcohol helps you have fun and helps relieve stress.” Well, it came from me, and as we have previously discussed, addiction, or dependence on alcohol is purely subjective.

It happened whilst I was going about a total change in my life, and I decided to stop drinking and smoking. It was during this time that I would be sitting quietly reading, listening to music, or doing some other activity, and I would feel compelled, motivated, to instantly jump up, go out buy a packet of cigarettes and go to the pub and get drunk. Now I don’t think I’m delusional, but I got an eerie feeling that I was not in complete control of my actions. How could I be sitting quietly one moment, and then fifteen minutes later, down at the pub drinking? To someone who has never experienced this, this may seem very strange.

The more I listened, the more I could hear the voice in my head. It was me! How could I go against my own wishes, which would not include getting drunk? I would even tell myself, “alan, you will not drink this week/month/year,” and surprise, surprise, I would suddenly find myself drunk again. This is scary for a person who believes they are of sound body and mind. How could I go three months with no alcohol and then suddenly crave it, and act on the craving immediately?

The definition of alcoholism is: “*habitual intoxication; prolonged and excessive intake of alcoholic drinks leading to a breakdown in health and an addiction to alcohol such that abrupt deprivation leads to severe withdrawal symptoms*” and “*an intense persistent desire to drink alcoholic beverages to excess.*” Well the first wasn’t me. I could go months at a time without alcohol, and I still went running a lot. The second was kind of like me, but not really. It wasn’t every day I wanted to get drunk, and anyway, it was in the culture to drink a lot. But I did start to think.

If I chose to become a vegetarian and give up meat instantaneously (something most people said would be impossible for them), and had no craving to eat sausages or fillet steak even once a year, what was it that was causing me to want to get drunk? First I started to blame it on personal relationship problems; then a lack of money, then unhappiness at work, then on my childhood, then on just fancying a pint, then tiredness just as a pick me up. I started thinking, “Uh oh! I’m actually coming up with any old reason to get drunk.” At that point I was scared; “Why can’t I stop drinking?” I thought to myself.

So after some advice by my partner, I looked into alcoholics anonymous and I was shocked. “How can this be an incurable disease? Am I going to die, can I never be helped with this? And while I’m at it, why do I have to hand myself over to god? Why am I not responsible? Why do I have to go to group meetings? Surely I should go to a hospital if I have a disease? My partner tells me it is *me* who is ruining our relationship through excess drinking. Surely this is my responsibility?”

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

And so I started taking personal responsibility for my drinking. That is what is necessary, not giving away responsibility; that is much too easy.

The disease trap

Alcoholism is not a disease. Alcohol abuse causes terrible trouble in society, but is something that needs to be addressed by taking responsibility for your actions. Do not ask people to feel sorry for you. You are doing something you love doing! When you are ready to face the consequences of your actions, and are ready to stop doing what you love; please move to the topic “Addiction.”

Responsibility

*Only you are in the position to help yourself.
Only you have the power to stop doing something you love.
You belong to the most intelligent species on the planet,
You must take responsibility.*

*The need to do something against yourself is frightening,
but take heart in the fact that you are more powerful than the addiction.
You will defeat it if you really want to.
You will be the one responsible for your success.
You are the most intelligent being on the planet.*

[Back to Index](#)

Anger

1. *A strong emotion; a feeling that is oriented toward some real or supposed grievance*
2. *The state of being angry*

I have never been what you would call, an “angry man,” but on reflection, I guess I used to get angry quite regularly. I can’t even remember what used to trigger it, but one minute I was calmly having a conversation, and the next second, whhhoooooosh! ANGER. I normally calmed down straight away and probably apologised, or just stormed off. But recently, when thinking about anger, I started to look back at my life, to see what it was that was actually causing it.

I guess the more stressed I got at work, or in my personal life, the easier it was to trigger, but it usually involved me not getting what I wanted, or when things didn’t go my way. Or is that the same thing? Fortunately for me, my anger never turned physical, and was restricted to lots of shouting, banging of doors, and the occasional kicking of some inanimate object. I was never proud of my actions afterwards, but if people hadn’t provoked me, then I wouldn’t have got angry, would I?!

Provocation

1. *Unfriendly behaviour that causes anger or resentment*
2. *Something that incites or provokes; a means of arousing or stirring to action*

I don’t know if you’ve ever had noisy neighbours. I have. It was a couple in the flat below me, both in their thirties, and both with good jobs, but nearly every night they would be arguing. She would be screaming at him, he would be screaming at her, and things would inevitably be thrown; but if you saw them the next day on the way to work, you wouldn’t have thought they had been fighting. I never saw any bruises on either of them, and any time I spoke to them they never mentioned the fighting, nor apologised for making so much noise (even though they must have known I could hear them). But one day I decided to have it out with the guy, I wanted to know if everything was all right, and check that he wasn’t going to murder his wife!

Me: Hi, can I have a word with you for a minute?

Him: Sure, what about?

Me: (talking quietly) Well, it’s just that I keep hearing you two shouting and screaming at each other, and look, you’re both nice people, so I just wanted to know if everything is all right. I mean, I don’t want to interfere or anything (fortunately he didn’t look like the type of guy who was going to hit me for interfering).

Him: No. It’s ok, alan, come in; the wife’s out for the evening. (He looked weary) Sit down...

Me: I’m sorry, it’s just I don’t want to see anything bad happen to either of you, you seem like a nice couple.

Him: Thanks. Well we are, or we were. I don’t know if I should be telling you this, oh, what the heck you’re here now, and it’s good to have someone to talk to. For the last six months we have been having money worries, and it’s really starting to upset my wife.

Me: Well, we’ve all got money worries. I’m up to my eyeballs in debt at the moment. But it’s not something I get angry over.

Him: Yeah, well, she blames me. She says it’s all my fault, that I’m no good, and that I don’t earn enough money.

Me: I bet that hurts.

Him: Tell me about it. She just keeps going on, and on about how she should have married her ex-boyfriend, and how she should never have married a loser like me. And I kind of lose it.

Me: I’m sure. Well it’s not nice when people say hurtful things. Being short of money is no reason to try to hurt your feelings.

Him: I don’t want to get angry; she just keeps on pushing and pushing...

Me: So she provokes you?

Him: Yeah, and then sometimes, I can’t control myself and I hit her, but never in the face.

Me: Well, that’s not good, is it?

Him: No. But I can’t help it. She hits me as well. I have even woken up in the middle of the night and she has been hitting me, or biting and scratching me! Can you imagine that? Being woken up in the

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

middle of the night by some lunatic biting you?

Me: So why don't you split up if you are so angry at each other; or at least get some counselling?

Him: We love each other, and we don't want to split up, but my wife says the only way we can be together is if I bring in more money; she says counselling just costs more money!

Me: Look, I am sure you can get free counselling somewhere. If you don't, you're going to kill each other by the sounds of it.

Him: But if she would only stop going on about me being a loser, I wouldn't get so angry.

Me: Well, tell her that it hurts you, and to stop it.

Him: She knows it hurts me, that's why she does it.

Me: Well don't let her provoke you, take a deep breath and leave the room if you have to. Tell her you will talk to her like an adult when she calms down.

Him: Ok, I'll try. I do love my wife you know.

Me: I'm sure. I've got to go. I'll see you soon.

Three weeks later I arrived home late in the evening from a night out with colleagues from work, and was surprised to see a police car and an ambulance outside our building. At first I didn't know what had happened, but then I saw my neighbour being led out by police. "Oh, no!" I thought, "what has he done?" He looked over as he was walking down the stairs of the apartment building to the waiting police car. "She just kept pushing me, she didn't know when to stop," he said, as he was passing. I was lost for words. I just wished I had been able to help both of them before it came to this.

Domestic violence

1. Violence or physical abuse directed toward your spouse or domestic partner; usually violence by men against women

It turned out that my neighbour had broken his wife's jaw in three places and she had a fractured rib. She had fought back hard, but in the end his strength had overcome her. "Oh well, another marriage down the drain," I thought, "all because of anger. He could probably go to jail if she pressed charges, and their relationship could never be the same again."

How often do we hear about stories of domestic violence in the media, where one partner (usually the male) has beaten up his wife because he was angry? We never really know the causes of it, and we probably never will, because you see, there is never a real "cause;" anger is something that builds and builds until the pressure cooker explodes, and out it comes.

Partners may have "provoked" each other by saying, or doing things they know antagonise (*provoke the hostility of*) each other, but anger in itself is just a release. It is the real or imagined things we dislike, or are in opposition of our own thinking, that act as the building blocks. Unfortunately, for the partner on the receiving end, it is very real and very scary, especially if it ends in physical violence.

So what are we to do, if we are going to transcend this anger? How can we live our lives differently so the sort of story I described stops happening? A lot of domestic violence is accompanied by alcohol, but just removing the alcohol doesn't stop the anger from building up; all alcohol does is "loosen the tongue." Do you understand? The anger will still be there tomorrow.

The workplace connection

I used to work for a company where my boss was always angry. Everything I did was wrong. Things that weren't even my fault were blamed on me. I used to see his boss coming into his office in the morning, closing the door, and starting to shout at him about anything and everything. This time it was about customer orders not being fulfilled, due to glitches in the computer system we had installed in several companies. I could see he was apologising profusely, and then, as the door swung open and the big boss left, I was duly summoned.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

“Sit down, alan!” he commanded, banging the door closed. “What the hell is going on? You promised me that there would be no more problems in the shipping system, do you know how stupid you’ve *made* me look? Do you?”

“Err no... I’m trying my best. It will be fixed soon. In fact I’ll go down to see the customer today,” I shakily replied.

“That’s not good enough! My boss wants to see results. He doesn’t want unhappy customers. Do you understand me?” he screamed. “Do you? Well get out there and get it fucking fixed. Now, get out of my office!”

Everyone was watching me, as I nervously left my boss’s office. What was I going to do? I couldn’t think how to fix it, and he wanted it fixed now, or I was definitely going to get fired.

“Yeah, what are you lot looking at?” I shouted at my colleagues, and went to sit down and think. In two seconds I shouted:

“Andy, paul, mike, my office, now! Meeting.”

Everyone came to sit down, notepads at the ready.

“What the fuck’s going on, mike? You told me you had fixed the code.”

“Well, I thought I did alan; the changes we made must have affected something else,” he replied.

“Well, what about you two?” I said to paul and andy. “You *must* have known that something like this was going to happen, how couldn’t you? It’s so obvious!” I shouted.

“Well it wasn’t,” said Mike calmly. “We will look at the code again today, and if we have to, we will reverse out the changes and hopefully that will fix it.”

“Oh my god. But then they will lose the new modifications they requested. What a fuck up! Get out all of you. You’re all fucking useless!”

I went outside to calm down and smoke a cigarette. How could they do this to me? This is such an important contract. They must be doing it to make me look bad. I’ve never liked that mike, smarmy bastard. I’ll fucking show them. I’ll sack the lot of them if they get me into trouble with my boss again. What a fucking day...

I got in the car and was annoyed to find there was heavy traffic: “Come on, for fuck’s sake. Jesus. Get out the way. Come on... Come on... Yeah and you too mate. Fuck off. You fucking idiot. Jesus some drivers...”

I got home...

“Hi alan, how was your day, honey?” my girlfriend asked me.

“I’ve had the *worst* fucking day...”

“Oh that’s a shame, poor baby. I’ll run you a nice bath and pour you a glass of wine,” she said kindly.

“Oh, that’s great, I really need it,” I replied.

“Oh, just one thing, we got another bill from the gas and electric people, this time it’s a red one. Can you pay it tomorrow?”

Whoosh, and I felt the anger rise up in me like an electric current running through my whole body.

“Why can’t you fucking pay it, can’t you see how busy I am?”

“But I just thought...”

“Well, don’t!” I shouted. “I can’t believe you. I’m out at work all fucking day, and all you have to do is pay one lousy fucking bill!” I kept on.

“But I’m out at work too, I don’t have much time either,” she said, almost crying.

“Well, you don’t know what it means to work hard,” I shouted. “All you do is sit in your little office typing all day. Jesus, one fucking bill, and you can’t pay it. I can’t believe you’re hassling me about it as soon as I come in, you’re such an inconsiderate bitch!”

She was sobbing by now... “I hate you alan, all I wanted was for you to come home, have a nice bath, and relax, but now you can go to hell!”

“Yeah, you too. I’m going out.”

“Come on, we’re going out,” I said to the dog.

He was a big dog, and I have to admit, not very well trained, and during the whole walk he was pulling and pulling at the lead. “Stop it. STOP IT!” I shouted at him. “Come here, come here. Heel. Stupid dog,” and I hit him on the bottom hard. He yelped. “Now do as you’re told!” I growled. “Ah fuck this, I’m taking you home, and I’m going for a drink.”

I threw him inside and marched down to the local pub, where I saw some people I knew.

“Hi, alan, how you doing?”

“Fine, bit stressed, I’ll be much better after a pint.”

And I was. I sat at the bar chatting away with strangers quite happily. Because you can’t get angry at strangers can you? They might take offence. They might hit you. No. It’s best to play it safe and get angry with people who can’t hurt you, or are in a subordinate position. As I stumbled home, thinking about what I would say to my girlfriend if she started on me again, I resolved to come down really hard on those idiots from work...

**

Ok, so I have experienced a fair amount of anger in my life. I have been angry about everything from not earning enough money, to trains not coming on time, dropping food on my tie, being late for the cinema, nobody listening to me etc. If things didn’t work out the way I wanted them, I got angry. Even if I dropped a piece of toast on the floor I would swear and curse at the stupid toast. Everyone bore the brunt of my anger: My colleagues, my bosses, my dog, my parents, my girlfriends, and my friends. “Why is life not working out the way I wanted it to,” I kept asking myself. “Everyone seems to have it in for me.”

As time went on, I left the stressful work environment I had placed myself in, and went travelling; but things just didn’t improve. I was still angry at my new wife, because of things she said to me, my money situation, the bills, and moving to a new country. I decided to seek help.

My therapist said I had high core stress levels, and that once I had reduced them, the whole anger thing should go away. He was right, slowly but surely it did. He asked me how I would feel in certain situations, and how I would act, and then helped me change the way I thought about things. I began to see that things didn’t matter as much as I thought they did, and through the development of awareness, I began to notice when I was getting angry and I would let it go.

Whenever I saw somebody getting angry in a pub, “Are you looking at my girlfriend? Do you want to fight about it...?” I would stand there and just look on incredulously. How could they not see, that all of this is imaginary (even if the situation is real)?

What does it matter if someone is looking at someone else’s girlfriend? She’s not a possession. Inevitably there would be a fight, and shirts would be ripped, noses broken, blood pouring everywhere; and finally ejection from the pub, more fighting, followed by arrest. What a great night out! All caused because one man had a thought, which passed across his mind in a flash that someone was looking at his girlfriend; and if someone was looking at her, then he might take her away from him, or his girlfriend might find the someone more attractive... And whoosh... “Are you looking at my girlfriend?” It all seemed so silly to me now. But after I split up from my wife and left australia, I met a girl who showed me that anger is only a baby compared with rage.

Rage

1. *A feeling of intense anger*
2. *A state of extreme anger*
3. *Behave violently, as if in state of a great anger*

I always thought she was a passionate girl, and that her loud, animated talking was perhaps cultural. I even thought that it may be good to have a girlfriend who was emotional, at least that meant she was “alive,” so I was prepared to put up with her temper (*a disposition to exhibit uncontrolled anger*) from time to time.

I was staying with her and her family, while I was trying to write this book, and she “let” me write as often as I wanted, except in the evenings and the weekend. That was “our” time, she explained. I tried to point out to her I was never going to finish this book, unless I had no limitations on when I could write, but she didn’t see it that way: “What do you fucking think, man? That I’m here to cook all your fucking dinners? That I am here to clean the house and wash your clothes? I’m not your fucking servant!”

As usual, I just listened, and let it go, but that just seemed to annoy her even more.

“Look,” I said, “I’m not going to argue with you. I don’t want to fight, I just want to write my book.”

And that’s when something in the room changed. It was like someone turning up the temperature by 1000

degrees, and the violent energy in the room was terrifying.

“You fucking mother fucker. You fucking bastard. Fucking, fucking bastard. I do everything for you, everything, and this is how you repay me?”

I started to say something, but then was hit by a variety of objects flying at me.

“How fucking dare you come to my country and stay with my parents, and show me no respect, you fucker! I give you a place to write and all I want to do is spend a little time with you, is that too much to ask?” Her eyes were blazing, her body twisted with rage. I was glad we weren’t near the knives in the kitchen. “All I want is for you to spend time with me. Do you understand? You miserable, selfish, fucking bastard.”

I can’t remember how long it went on for, but it was too long for my liking. I just stood there, transfixed to the spot, and realised I had to leave her; and I did, shortly afterwards. The problem was, all she *did* want was to spend time with me, because she liked being with me, and I was refusing to comply with her wishes. I wanted one thing (to write my book), and she wanted another (to spend time with me), but rather than either of us compromising, we both kept on our own paths until it was too late. She could no longer contain the energy she had in her mind, and she had to release the pressure.

Fortunately, I had learnt to let things go, or you can imagine the violent rage that two people could create. Several months later I thought about the situation again, and I realised I had wanted to tell her. “I’ve had enough of your fucking shouting and screaming, it’s making me sick. I only came here to write my book, and when it’s finished, I *never* want to see you ever again!”

Transforming anger

So anger hadn’t left me. Perhaps I was just suppressing it, which I am told is a bad thing as well! I started to realise, that although I was no longer really angry in trivial situations, I was still angry; and this time I was angry at the world. I was angry that people didn’t care about each other. I was angry that they were angry at each other. I was angry at consumerism. I was angry at violence. I was angry at politicians. I was angry at war.

Suddenly it came to me. If I am angry at violence, then I must still be violence. If I am angry at war, then I am war. Do you understand? It didn’t matter that I was “justified” in being angry at Man’s stupidity, because whilst I was still angry I was part of the stupidity of Man!

I tried to find out what was causing this, and I knew then that this was an absence of love. Not love as a man has for a woman, but love for all things, for all beings; unconditional love, universal love. A love that cannot be described in words, but is an energy that affects all around it. “But how would I become love?” I questioned. Love is not describable, love is not something you can touch; it is something that exists throughout the universe.

“I must be love. I am love.” I said.

“That’s right,” said a voice in my head: “You are.”

And I am. You are. We are all love, but the mind – which is thought – and emotions get in the way. Somehow they block the energy, and replace it with anger and rage, which are only human inventions. They do not exist, although the results do.

We are love. Every single particle that makes up our fragile bodies contains love. It is not discoverable by the scientists, who see only electrons and protons; this is something far more fundamental. This is the stuff we are made of. But every time we get angry or fly into a rage, we disturb the balance. Why else do you think you “feel” the violent energy? The mind can’t contain it any longer, and the energy fills the room affecting every person in it. But don’t take my word for it!

Observe yourself the next time you are angry or in a rage, or when someone else gets angry at you; and realise that you only have “to be,” to allow the balance to return. Language just gets in the way. Just be. Do not speak, but, instead, allow your whole being to fill up with the love that thought has been so desperately trying to block so it gets its own way. But thought is not you. Remember that.

Things that annoy me – I am love and I let go
Things that people say to me that I dislike – I am love and I let go

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Situations that happen that I can't control – I am love and I let go
People that say things to upset me – I am love and I let go
Things I imagine people are saying about me – I am love and I let go
I don't get what I want - I am love and I let go
I can't convince you that I'm right - I am love and I let go

I let the thoughts wash over my mind, like waves lapping at the shore.

[Back to Index](#)

Animals

1. *A living organism characterized by voluntary movement*

We are surrounded by animals everywhere, aren't we? Animals are part of the natural world we inhabit. There are also thousands of different species of insects, reptiles, and birds, which I would also like to include in our discussion here. Some are big, some are tiny, some look nice, and others we see as ugly; some are scary, and some are deadly.

Here's the thing; they're all part of the earth, just like us, although perhaps we would consider ourselves above everything else on earth. We are superior. We are human beings; the most intelligent species on the planet, characterized by superior intelligence, articulate speech, and erect carriage; and we have consciousness (*an alert cognitive state in which you are aware of yourself and your situation*), which we believe all other creatures on the planet do not. We're the boss. We rule the earth.

Which is all very nice for us, the human; the supreme predator. We can do what we want. We can kill animals, make them extinct, or change their habitat so drastically they can't live there anymore; no one can stop us, we are invincible! Yet we don't really seem to know a lot about our friends we share the earth with, do we? Sure, we study them, measure them, curate them, and domesticate them; but what do we really know about them?

As humans, we selfishly consider "Why am I here, what is the purpose of my life, and what is the true meaning of life?" We pray to gods for salvation; we look forward to reincarnation, or heaven; to nirvana, a place where life is better and all your dreams come true. But we never care to ask:

Why are they here?

Probably because we don't care; we're too busy progressing to worry about that. As far as we're concerned they're a pretty tasty meal, and as for the ones we don't eat; well, as long as they stay out of our way, we'll let them live. Perhaps we may stick them in a cage or a zoo to look at if they're cute, but definitely keep them out of towns and cities; we don't want to get too close to them.

According to evolutionary theories, we are a relative of the ape, and have evolved over millions of years to reach the point we are at now. We are different from the apes as we have evolved into a biped (*walking on two feet*), and are now able to free up our hands for complex tool making and other tasks. Our brain has grown as well, and we are now capable of complex thought and decision making.

We seem to have outgrown the rest of the planet in our abilities. For now there is no one to challenge us psychologically or physically, although that being said; we are not able to challenge lions or tigers hand to hand, but with the development of weapons we can control them and other creatures that could pose us a threat; from a distance.

I have one question for you though: do you consider yourself part of the animal kingdom, or do you see yourself apart, as something so different to other life on earth that you have no connection to it anymore?" From observation of people, I would have to say that the latter is probably true. But let's get back to our main question: What are animals doing here? They don't have ambition, they don't drive nice cars, they don't pray to gods, they aren't worried about their credit cards, they aren't looking for a promotion, they aren't lying to one another constantly, they aren't digging up the planet to make more money; in fact, they don't know what money is. They don't go to casinos, or drink fine wines, and they don't wage war or destroy their own environment. All in all, animals are pretty useless, aren't they? It's no wonder we don't care about them. They don't contribute at all!

We are the ones who build the schools, the hospitals, the roads, the telecommunication links; we do! We generate the wealth, build the planes, the cars, and grow food for the nations. In fact, we do everything; what do the animals do?

Stop for a moment and just observe

Have you ever stopped to watch a worm in the soil, and then watch a bird come and eat it? Have you ever lifted a log to see the ants and other insects busying themselves with activity, or watched deer in the forest, or

hedgehogs at night? Have you looked at the spider's web in the fresh morning dew, or watched a bee buzzing around flowers in the summer? If you have, you'll know that it's an incredible sight to see; millions of different creatures all performing different tasks; and the strange thing is, they're not complaining, they're not unhappy with their lot; they just get on with the task in hand. Why? Because it needs to be done!

This is the difference between us; they have a specific task to do which must be done every day, but through our complex thought and abilities we don't have a specific task to do every day. Well, not one that keeps the world in balance. We are able to grow food on a huge scale now, so we are no longer having to hunt and gather, which leaves us with a lot of extra time on our hands. Now we spend our time trying to make more than anyone needs, create products that addict our bodies and minds, and indulge ourselves in the pursuit of money and pleasure.

Let's face it, we haven't got anything else to do, so we have invented new ways of occupying ourselves. We're still busy; in fact busier than our ancestors ever were, but not in the same way. We have progressed to such an extent that the idea of working just for food and water is laughable to us; although this still goes on in some countries, whom we call poor, and third world. Our pursuit is now money, and what we can acquire with it.

Meanwhile, our unintelligent friends are still busying themselves every day, whilst we worry about the mortgage, fight over land, kill each other with bombs, stress about work, are unhappy in our relationships, try to lose weight, or try to give up smoking. We humans have got it tough; they should be glad they're not as intelligent as us! We see ourselves above nature. We see nature as something to be admired, feared, and then controlled. One thing's for sure, we are not a part of it anymore.

We have intelligence; we can create art, design sculptures, put on ballets and theatre. We can split the atom, design a machine that flies in the air, fly a pineapple from one part of the globe to another and keep it fresh enough to eat. Show me one creature that can do that? I couldn't, and neither could anyone else. Do you know why? Because the creatures on the earth don't care about those things; they are here for a purpose. It is the that we are missing – the purpose, of keeping the world in balance.

Ecosystem

1. A system formed by the interaction of a community of organisms with their physical environment

As with nature, when we talk about the ecosystem, we talk about something that is external to us. We never see ourselves as part of it. Let's try to find out why.

In the summertime, I have often wondered about the purpose of wasps, especially while I am eating my meal outside. Their purpose, as I see it, is to distract me from the enjoyment of a nice salad and maybe sting me in the process.

Scientists can tell you everything these days; what the purpose of this flower is or the purpose of that insect is, but no one can tell you what your purpose is in this great ecosystem.

We know we are the ultimate predator, but that's it. We artificially grow food in huge quantities, and farm animals for meat, outside of the natural system. We destroy pests that come too close to our food production system with chemicals, and we kill animals that try to eat our livestock. We deny the rest of the animal kingdom access to any of our food sources.

We protect our cities from the intrusion of animals by making them of concrete. We keep our city parks clear of wild animals and birds, unless we have semi-domesticated them. We move species from country to country, introducing new species without any thought to whether this will upset the balance of the local ecosystem. We are not helping the world to stay in balance – we are actively upsetting it. Why? Because of the human thought: "If you don't understand something, control it or destroy it."

How many times has a fly or a bee come into your house, or a spider sneaked out behind the woodwork, or an ant crawled across the floor? Quite regularly, I would assume. What's your reaction?

Well, I know some people are in absolute terror! They instantly swipe at it or stamp on it until it's dead. "Phew that's better!" they think, calmly sweeping away the remains into the bin. Other people may spray them with insecticide, or desperately try to get them outside without killing them, but one thing's for sure; you don't want them in your house, do you? This is an animal free zone. No birds, no creatures, no insects,

just humans (oh, and maybe your dog, cat, fish, or bird in a cage). You may be wondering why we keep what we call pets, so let's look into it together.

Pet

1. A domesticated animal kept for companionship or amusement

Dogs are cute aren't they? And they're pretty funny too. My labrador kept me amused with his antics every day, even when he was eating my shoes or chewing on a piece of the sofa. When I was lonely he used to come over and put his head in my lap – he was great company.

But of course, dogs weren't always like this. Our ancestors domesticated (*make fit for cultivation, domestic life, and service to humans*) the wild dog many thousands of years ago, and have been gradually cross-breeding, and changing the characteristics of the dog, until you have the perfect companion we have today – “Man's best friend.”

Some people are cat lovers, as cats are more independent, but still show affection. Other people just keep a fish in a fifty centimetre glass bowl, and watch it aimlessly swimming round and round; or even keep a bird in a small cage, so it can never fly. But if you let the bird out for a moment it would fly away, wouldn't it? And quite right too. Freedom!

Whatever pet we keep (some keep what they call exotic pets, like snakes, lizards, and tropical spiders which are not domesticated), we have taken the animal out of its natural environment, whether now or in the distant past. We have tried to change the animal into something *we* like – we are not happy for it to remain wild.

As for dogs and cats, we have tried to make them more human. We bathe them, feed them human food, dress them in a coat when they are cold, give them beds, and even let them sleep with us. We love them like children. We are proud to walk our dogs, and we like to come home to our cats – they are almost a substitute for human company (some people prefer them, as they don't answer back!). They are part of the family, except in other countries where dogs and cats are on the menu.

“How could you?” the dog and cat owners scream. But in reality they are just the same as other meat; and probably quite tasty! It is how we see our animals that matters. Some are seen as animals for company which we could never kill, and others are just seen as dinner. If you're an animal it just depends on what country your living in whether you get eaten or treated to a nice warm house and a snack before bed.

Some people revere the cow, whilst others enjoy it as medium rare steak

So, our views on animals depend on what species they are, and what country we're living in. Domesticated animals are not feared, but you would run a mile if a pack of wild dogs were running round your local park, wouldn't you? Fear of animals is mostly unfounded, as we aren't actually on anyone's menu. Even lions and tigers don't like humans as their first preference, neither do great white sharks in the oceans; but they look like they are going to kill us at the first opportunity they get (admittedly, we would probably do best to stay out of their way, just in case they mistook us for a zebra or seal).

The thing is, they look scary, and in the past, when we were actually hunting wild animals, it was much more dangerous. We had a fairly high chance of being killed, so maybe this is a fear that hasn't evolved out of us yet? We are scared of the natural world.

How many of you have camped out in the forest, or walked in a wood at night with the noise of the animals moving around and calling out to each other? Scary isn't it? Especially if a spider's web touches your face! It's enough to make you run screaming back to the comfort of the city; where, if you remember from other topics, you have much more chance of coming to harm at the hands of one of your own species, than you ever would at the hands of an animal in the forest.

It's just a fear of the unknown that makes us scared; although animals, insects, and birds manage to co-exist quite happily together, even though they are definitely on someone menu. Yes, it's much more tense

being an animal than a human in the forest; but although they may have fear, they carry on with their job as part of the ecosystem. A human wouldn't go within a hundred miles of somewhere he may be eaten, even if the ecosystem depended on it.

So to recap. As long as we have control over the animal world we feel safe, and although we like to have animals in our house, it has to be one we can domesticate, humanise, and one that looks attractive. If you have eight legs, big eyes, a fat hairy body, and you sneak in and out of the sink; I'm afraid you can forget it. The only thing a human will give you is death.

So we have started to create a list of animals we like, others we like to eat, and others we avoid in case they eat us. By the way, anything with more than four legs, no legs, or is in any way slimy, scaly, prickly, or small (think mice in the kitchen) is to be avoided at all costs, whether dangerous or not. Although we still do like to think of ourselves as animal lovers, don't we?

Look at the cute bear on tv...

Have you ever watched animated films for children? What sort of animals are they? They have insects, birds, lions, tigers, spiders, and bears, all of whom could be dangerous or poisonous in the wild; yet they look somewhat different. Have you noticed it? Their eyes are bigger like a child's, their features are more human, they have the ability to smile, and wait for it... They talk in a language we understand! Very unlike the animals we meet in the forest, aren't they? It makes them altogether more likeable. I find myself becoming fond of skunks, tortoises, rabbits, bears, and squirrels.

Everywhere you look, there's animated films with talking animals; even adults love them, because the animals all look cute and cuddly. Just like a toy, they look as if you could cuddle them when you feel sad or lonely. In other words, the animals look like they would be comforting. Please excuse the repetitiveness of this word cute (*attractive especially by means of smallness or prettiness or quaintness*), but I think it is an apt term here.

We think that animals are important to children. We buy them picture books with cute animals in them, take them to the zoo, we show them nature programs about animals, and get them to draw pictures of their favourite animals, then we say:

"Hurry up and eat your meat."
"Who wants a sausage?"
"Mmmmm, do you want a burger?"
"How about some nice ham?"
"Would you like a fish finger?"

Children being children (innocent), do not know the link between "the little piggy" in the book, and the sausage; or the cow going "moooo" in the field, and a cheeseburger; or the "talking fish" in the cartoon and a fish finger. It doesn't cross a child's mind, and we try to protect children from what we are; from what we do as humans, by dressing it up in "cute" pictures and language.

We would never drive past a cow and say: "See that cow, alan? Soon it will become your burger." And why not? Because we don't want to upset the child. This is true even as we grow up into adults.

We buy our chicken breast, steak, and pork chops from the supermarket, where it's all nicely packaged in plastic, and doesn't look anything like the animals in the fields. If it did, we'd probably all be vegetarians by now.

Gone are the days when we used to hunt a wild beast with a spear and eat its flesh. We're much too scared now; in fact, even now, when we could kill animals with guns, which some people class a sport (deer hunting or duck hunting), how many people could really say they would be happy removing the intestines and cleaning the flesh? Not many I bet.

So we have an uneasy relationship with nature, don't we? On the one hand, we love animals and on the other, we want to control, kill, and eat them. We're afraid of them, yet they should be infinitely more scared of us. We like to visit them in zoos, but we would go mad if they were running wild in our cities. We seek to understand them, but only at a distance.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

I would like you to do one thing for me will you, as animal lovers, if that's all right? Take an hour on a saturday, or anytime you have available, and go down to a slaughterhouse (*a place where animals are butchered*). Oh, and be sure to take the whole family with you, especially young children. It really is pleasant to see how we electrocute and carve up our favourite animals with huge machines, so we can have a sausage or a chicken burger.

Most people have probably never seen an animal die in close quarters. Some die in silence, most scream in pain, all experience great fear. Stand for a moment and take in the smell, the putrid smell of flesh, and see our magnificent triumphs over the animals, great hunters...

Let's imagine a fictional scenario, where the animals are in charge, shall we? They set up big factories where they farm the humans, keep them in little cages with no room to move, or fatten them up, because animal christmas is about to arrive. They kill millions of you every year by putting you on electric spikes, or with a bolt of electricity to the brain. You are chopped, diced, sliced, minced, processed, and cut into tasty morsels so the animals wouldn't know what they were eating; shipped to the animal supermarket, bought and cooked, only for baby bear to throw you on the floor and say "mum, I'm not hungry," and throw you in the bin. Now reverse that story, and that's what goes on now.

Why are they here?

One question that you may feel we haven't dealt with in its entirety, is why animals are here; and before you answer, it's not just to provide us with meat and sport. Why? It's simply because the world exists. And the world needs taken care of. They give life as they take life. The animals, the fish, the mammals, the insects, the trees, and the birds; they're the real custodians of the planet. We'd just ruin it if it was left to us.

So next time you walk in the forest, in the park, or go to swat a fly, or kill a spider, think about the important job that all the animals, birds, and insects do; and extend them a little respect, as they go about their daily business of keeping the world in balance.

[Back to Index](#)

Antibiotics

1. *A chemical substance derivable from a mould or bacterium that kills micro-organisms and cures infections*

When antibiotics were first discovered, they were known as a wonder drug. They were the cure for our many ills. They worked quickly and effectively, and now every time you go to the doctor you seem to be given antibiotics for whatever it is that's wrong with you. Make no mistake. They work. Over the last hundred years or so, many brilliant chemists have worked day and night to find cures for all the major diseases that have plagued the world. They are still searching for answers for some, but I am sure that it is only a matter of time before they do.

These cures are distributed in the form of medicinal drugs prescribed by qualified medical doctors; and we assume they are doing us good, because soon after taking them, we normally start to feel better. It's all thanks to the pharmaceutical companies who make them. The strange thing is, whenever I go to my local doctor – which is very rare – I feel as if I am no longer in the door, than they are writing me out a prescription for some penicillin, or some antibiotics. Maybe it's just me?

I began thinking deeply about this, especially when I compared it to my studies of traditional thai massage (one branch of traditional thai medicine; the others being diet, spirituality, and herbs). In thailand, they believe you must always treat the individual patient, not the symptom. They look at your whole body, your lifestyle, and your mind, in order to diagnose the disease (it may be traditional medicine, but it's worked well for several thousand years).

The principal of their medicine (and all other eastern medicine) is prevention, rather than cure, whereas the principal of our medicine is wait until it gets so bad that only the strongest chemicals will cure it.

To be fair, western medicine can cure in areas eastern medicines can't. I have a friend who has just had a heart attack; he is 56 and has lived his whole life over indulging in fatty foods, alcohol, and cigarettes. He was a publican for many years and took no notice of his health. He suffered from angina (*any disease of the throat or fauces marked by spasmodic attacks of intense suffocative pain*) for over ten years, until three months ago, he had a heart attack, and was rushed to hospital. They injected him with a life saving drug, and several weeks later he was taken into surgery to be given a triple bypass operation, whereby the damaged part of his heart was bypassed with a vein taken from his leg.

He has since made a complete recovery and is doing well (now on a non dairy, vegetarian diet). Eastern medicine would not have been able to save him in the moment, but eastern medicine and a healthy lifestyle may have prevented him from having the heart attack in the first place.

The idea of prevention is alien in our western society. We expect to do whatever we like to our bodies and then have someone fix it; and this is where the drug companies come in. They are masters at last minute life savers, although we must not forget the wonderful surgeons and doctors who do such a great job; without whom many lives around the world would be considerably shorter.

This pop a pill idea is so popular now that people eat, smoke, and drink themselves towards an early grave, only to be saved at the last moment by western medicine. Only then do they wake up to what they've been doing to their health.

So who are these people who make these life saving drugs? Are these charitable people intent on saving the world from disease? Are they government scientists? The answer to both of those questions is a resounding no. The people who make these drugs are employed by multinational companies, whose prime motivation as a public or private company, is profit. That is why they are in business; not to heal the world, but to keep the shareholders happy.

They don't actually care what you do with your life, that's your choice. Health and prevention is nothing to do with them. As they see it, it's the government's job to educate you, and your job is to listen; they are only there as a backup when things go wrong, or a specific cure is needed for a specific disease.

Our health in the hands of the shareholders

I became worried that there must be a conflict of interest going on. Surely someone whose primary motivation is money, has different priorities to someone only concerned with helping people? The companies would say they can achieve both, but I'm not so sure. The pharmaceutical business is worth many billions of dollars around the world, and with all drugs patented, the drug company can set whatever price they want – so if you haven't got the money, you can't get the treatment.

From a business point of view that seems fair. If the newspaper costs £1.00 and you only have 50 pence, you can't buy the newspaper; but this isn't about newspapers, this is about the lives of human beings, and this is evident in developing nations that desperately need access to retro-viral drugs (which inhibit the onset of aids; a disease which is killing millions across the world).

Because these people live in poor countries where the governments are usually corrupt, there is little money to buy these lifelines. I am aware it costs a lot of money to produce these drugs, and that the money needs to come from somewhere; but I cannot understand why such an important role is left to private individuals who are trying to make money, not just for themselves, but usually for their shareholders who demand a return on their money every year.

Would we as tax payers not be prepared to fund research into cures that may potentially save us one day? Do we not care about saving our fellow humans in other parts of the world? Probably not. We want to spend our money on things that bring us pleasure! If we get sick, that's someone else's problem, and indeed it is. The privately run multinational pharmaceutical companies to be exact.

The miracle workers

They love it when we get sick, after all, if no one was getting sick what would be the point of investing all that money in new drugs? We get sick, the doctor prescribes the cure, we get better, the multinational gets paid. Seems a fair system, doesn't it? No one loses out. Or do they?

In the west we have come to rely on "simple" cures like antibiotics, to cure almost any common ailment; just as we have drugs for flu, hay fever, headaches, backaches, leg aches – you name it, there's a pharmaceutical drug for it. High blood pressure, anxiety, depression, even schizophrenia, there's drugs for all. The whole world can live better lives thanks to the big pharmaceutical companies!

My dad now takes various drugs every day to control his high blood pressure, without which he would be in serious trouble; so most people would agree that pharmaceuticals are wonder drugs. They are quick acting, usually effective, and if you forget the nasty (sometimes very nasty) side effects, they could truly be called a modern miracle.

Man has finally overcome nature. We can cure what was previously incurable, we can control what would have previously been fatal, and we can arrest the development of diseases in their tracks! These drug companies have taken the personal out of personal responsibility, and replaced it with corporate. These are the people who now take responsibility for your health. These faceless multi-billion dollar giants are the people who will look after your health; for just a few pounds for each drug you buy. No longer do we need to look after our own health, why should we? We can live a completely unhealthy lifestyle, and just before we die, be given a wonder drug, and some clever surgery, and extend our life for another few years.

But I would like to ask you a serious question. How many illnesses around today are actually because of the life we lead? Do we even know the effect that all the electronic and radio equipment is having on us? Do we know what happens when we microwave our food, or when we spray pesticides and other chemicals over our fruit and vegetables; or what happens when the animals we are eating are injected with antibiotics? I certainly don't. Do you? And yet we carry on regardless, feeling safe in the knowledge that someone else is looking out for us.

The human system – although strong and resilient – is a finely balanced machine. Is it not surprising that we get sick, and catch diseases, with the food we ingest and the artificial environment we live in? Our system is not prepared for the stress we put it under, but it is all credit to it that it manages to stay in balance, despite our best efforts to subdue it. We don't listen to our bodies when they tell us to slow down or tell us to rest, we just pop another pill and carry on. I'm not sure if you know that headache pills only mask the signal your body is passing to you, they don't cure it.

Illness is when the body is no longer in balance. Feeding it unnatural remedies may be a quick fix, but it does not bring the body back into balance like a natural cure would. For thousands of years, herbalists have been decocting plants and picking medicinal herbs to cure illness. They have looked to nature to provide the cure, and it has. These days, we rely on a company whose primary motivation is money, to invent a synthetic drug to cure us, and I think it is sad we lost touch with our connection to the earth – where the true healing is.

Unfortunately, natural cures are still regarded by the western medical profession as "quack" (*an untrained*

person who pretends to be a physician and who dispenses medical advice) medicine. As far as they are concerned, the only way to cure someone, is through a combination of the use of drugs which have gone through rigorous testing process, and invasive surgery (which, it has to be said, does produce good results).

Because they do not have the conclusive “empirical” (*derived from experiment and observation rather than theory*) evidence that is required in western pharmaceutical medicine, eastern, or traditional medicine which uses herbs and plants is dismissed. I see this as a short sighted view; after all, some of these traditional systems have been successfully treating people for thousands of years! If they had never managed to cure anyone then we would have to agree with western doctors, but I think the evidence speaks for itself.

Traditional, as I prefer to call it, rather than “alternative” medicine is derived from nature, the most powerful force in the universe; so whether the medicine is “spiritual,” uses stones, or crystals, oils, bark from the tree, special chanting techniques, many hands placed above the body, needles inserted into the body, or pressure exerted on specific points, we must all admit that if it works, then that is all the evidence we need! Why do we need more evidence than that?

In my training in traditional thai yoga massage, we used acupressure along “invisible” energy lines. Dissection was forbidden in thai medicine in the past, and yet if you look a chart of these invisible lines over a western anatomical figure, you will see that they closely map to the nervous system of the body. How did they know that 2500 years ago? Who knows; and until we understand energy and the body more, we will remain in the dark. All I can say is, the treatment I use, which is based on ancient techniques, works. Amazingly, people feel better! That is pretty good evidence, don’t you think?

But still the western scientists won’t give in; they believe their way is the only way. I’m sorry to say that it isn’t. That isn’t to say that you should run around the world looking for any old traditional medicine practitioner; I’m sure there are as many bad ones as there are bad western doctors, it is purely individual. All I can suggest is that you keep an open mind to anything and everything, western and eastern, but don’t just pop a pill because it’s available.

You need to try to become more aware of your body at all times; you need to feel your own body – not physically – but try to visualise it; starting with the head and working down through your shoulders, through your arms and fingers, down your torso, down your legs to your toes.

Listen to your body before you run down to the doctor with every ailment; all you will be filled with, is synthetic drugs, which you remember, only treat the symptom, not the whole patient. But of course, the overworked doctors are too busy with everyone and their illnesses these days to have time to concentrate on treating the patient.

Pain is the sign that the body is out of balance, and you need to find that vital ingredient to put your body back into balance. But please look to yourself and to nature first before you look to the man in the suit. Nature has your best interest at heart. Does the pharmaceutical company?

As we close this discussion, I have an important item to share with you which may give you something to think about. We have talked about humans finding cures for all sorts of diseases, and managing to extend our lives where we would have died in such cases; but why do we need to find a cure for disease?

That might sound like the stupidest thing you’ve read since picking up this book, but I am serious. It is so we can extend our lives so they are not terminated before what we think is their “time.” But who actually knows why we get diseases? Maybe this is nature’s way of controlling the population, so the earth’s limited resources are kept in balance.

On the island I am living on at the moment, the stewards of the island, the tibetan buddhists, have a policy of not interfering with nature; and so it was, that I watched a young lamb, who had only days before, been gambolling with the other lambs, die slowly over several days. It was heartbreaking to watch, as its life-force gradually ebbed away. I felt cruel for not trying to help.

The vet we phoned said if we gave it some antibiotics, it would probably make a full recovery; but instead, we let nature take its course. This is true of all other animals humans do not have a use for, or have no monetary value – we just let nature take its course.

We do not grieve for them, we just say: “Oh well, that’s nature,” so I ask you why we do not just let nature take its course with humans? We talk about it “not being our time,” but how do we know that the disease isn’t nature telling us “it’s time?” Maybe we should stop interfering, and let nature take its course, but would that make us less than human? I will leave you with that thought.

[Back to Index](#)

Architecture

1. *The discipline dealing with the principles of design and construction and ornamentation of fine buildings*
2. *The profession of designing buildings and environments with consideration for their aesthetic effect*

We all love to look up at the wonderful buildings created by an architect some time ago in history, don't we? We marvel at the complexities of the work; the intricate detail, the bold statements, and the display of power it exudes. In every country, there are great monuments, civil buildings and private palaces, and let's not forget the churches and cathedrals.

But most of these are buildings of a different age, built when money was no object, by powerful wealthy men, as a testament to their great influence and status in the land.

Today's modern buildings pale into insignificance by comparison, don't you think? The only people who can afford to build grand buildings are wealthy companies, and they don't even do it. Why? Because they're just too darn expensive! And in an age where money is the bottom line, architecture and good taste seem to go out the window. Now we have monstrous office buildings dominating the skyline; and although impressive as feats of great engineering, they are in no way comparable to great palaces like versailles and the vatican.

"Those buildings were the vision of architects of the past," commented a well known architect. "Today's design is about clean lines, lots of glass; and tall, very tall." So although they don't have the exquisite stone masonry work the churches had, they still want to make a statement. They want to say "look at me, I am here! Oh, and by the way, I am owned by company X."

The architects of the past would be horrified by what they see now. "Where is the skill in that?" they would ask. "Where is the work of the artisans? All you have now is a big lump of metal with lots of glass." But you would want to ask them what they would have created if they had access to the most modern materials, and had machinery that could have got the job done in half the time at half the price! I'm sure they would have replied calmly that, "that wasn't the point of architecture."

I think it would be funny to see something as iconic as the coliseum in rome all done in modern steel and shiny smoked glass windows. Somehow I don't think they would get quite so many visitors as they do now.

But these iconic structures were different. They were built with the hands of men, with no fancy machinery to take the burden. You only have to look at the pyramids in giza to realise what a great feat was achieved in constructing them. Unfortunately, they probably used slaves, as their lives were valueless to the rulers; but nonetheless, they are still striking.

Whatever symbolism all these ancient structures were designed to convey, there was one thing that could be said about them – they were built to last! Some of the stones in these buildings are so huge you have to wonder if there weren't a race of giants living at that time who were employed to do all the hod carrying and brick laying. They just seem like impossible structures to create without all the modern engineering knowledge we have now. But created they were, and they still stand, in countries like italy and greece amongst many others.

These were advanced civilisations who had amazing knowledge, and we still fail to comprehend how it was all possible – given what they were up against. But as we said in the first paragraph, these were buildings designed to show how powerful the rulers were, to show how much greater they were than the ordinary man (who unfortunately, was the one made to create the structures).

Perhaps many thousands died building them, but to the rulers, their lives were unimportant; what was important was exercising their power over the people. And as such, great courts of law and palaces were built to keep the people in awe of their power. At the same time, the religious leaders were building their own monuments to themselves (sorry, to god) and showing what great power they (sorry, god) had over them.

So maybe it is better we don't create anymore of these structures as we have enough people in the present day trying to show how much power they have over others.

Let them crumble

If you ever have the misfortune to be called into your courts of law, you will feel the power that the buildings hold over you. You, the weak individual who has done wrong, versus the state, encompassed in the stonework and the grand arches. That is what these great stones convey to me; power – nothing more.

So why don't we just knock down all these institutions, after all, we don't really want any more reminders of how powerful the state was and still is. "You can't knock them down! These are national institutions, these

are the symbols of the country,” say the politicians (also thinking about the drop in visitor numbers).

But let’s imagine for a moment that we no longer had these ancient reminders of power, that unfortunately, we had a big earthquake which only targeted the churches, the cathedrals, the courts of law, and the buildings of government, amongst other things; how would your sense of national identity be without them?

For americans, the white house is a symbol of america’s power, not only over its neighbours, but also over its people. Imagine if it too fell, and the president was forced to live in a three bedroom house in downtown washington! How would his status be then? How powerful would the state be without the architectural symbols of national identity? How would you feel? Would you feel that something was missing, that somehow you didn’t feel so british, french, or american? What do you think? Would the power structure in the country continue if they could no longer extract the population’s obedience with these symbolic buildings?

Just think about it. All this great architecture was designed to do one thing; make you fear the state, the powerful, and the mighty. These buildings refused to let you intimidate the state. “Who are you, you are nothing compared to us,” the buildings would growl. I know that this discussion may seem a little silly to you, but I would like you to give your utmost attention to it.

Imagine if the rulers of your country (thanks to the impromptu earthquake) were forced to run the country from a local italian restaurant or tea room! That would be a funny sight to see. These people would be naked without their architectural symbols of power, and we would discover what we already knew – that they are nothing but men made of flesh and bone, now vulnerable without their “armour,” which are the buildings.

Would you still respect them; still look up to these great men, these powerful rulers? I’m sure you wouldn’t, and neither would I. Just like a tank commander who needs his tank, a ruler needs his buildings; and without them, he’s kind of, well, pathetic looking.

**

Several years ago I was travelling around europe with my wife, and we ended up in rome, where we followed the other million tourists to that great architectural colossus, the vatican (*the residence of the catholic pope in the vatican city*). Now I’m not follower of religions, but I do like the grandeur of the buildings, and the fantastic frescos (*a mural done with watercolours on wet plaster*) on the ceilings; so I was eager to get in and have a look around. I was upset to not be allowed in because my wife had “bare shoulders” (she had a singlet on as it was hot).

“What! Why can’t we get in?” I argued. I looked over at a sign that said all shoulders had to be covered. “Why? We only want to look around,” I muttered.

As we left with our heads hung low I happened to catch a glance at another lady, who, determined to comply with the rules, had inserted a napkin into either strap of her singlet, so it covered her shoulders. I laughed heartily when I saw this. The great power of the vatican disarmed by two napkins!

I don’t want to get into a silly debate about why women should cover up, or shouldn’t, that is a pointless; all that can be said is that these are rules created by powerful humans, men to be exact; so make up your own mind.

But back to the pope! Here is a man who sits in power over a church with millions of followers worldwide; so as a powerful man, he needs powerful symbols. He sits up on a balcony above us, like the religious images that are placed looking down on us in places of worship; and he issues his speeches. But imagine if the vatican was no more. Imagine our earthquake had magically swallowed up the whole vatican, and the pope and all of his deputies were forced into a rather more humble cottage or cafe. Where would his power be then? How in awe of god would you be when Man’s (catholic) representative on earth is giving speeches from a coffee shop? Please think about this because it is important.

You see, when you strip a man of his authority and his power, which in this case is the buildings, what does he become? A man, just like you and me; with his own fears and desires. But the powerful don’t want you to see the man like that. They don’t want the prime minister or president to look like you, otherwise why would you follow them? Do you see? Without his buildings surrounding him, the powerful man is nothing.

Let his buildings crumble around him, and with it let the symbols of power be gone. I’m sure the pope and the presidents are all nice people, and we can all look forward to getting on with them once they stop putting themselves above us. What do you think?

Unfortunately, these are pretty well made buildings so they will take a long time to crumble, so either we

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

hope move into cheap modern offices (after all who would respect someone who worked in one of those) or we wait. But don't worry; we have all the time in the universe.

But do me a favour will you, next time you are standing in front of these buildings zealously snapping them with your digital camera, just quietly remember why they were built. Then remember the people who built them, and who they built them for.

[Back to Index](#)

Arguing

1. *A contentious speech act; a dispute where there is strong disagreement*
2. *Present reasons and arguments*

*“I am right and you are wrong
and if you can't see that
you must be more stupid than I thought”*

We all argue from time to time; sometimes about important issues, sometimes about trivial things. More often than not, it's with our partners, or our parents, and occasionally with friends and work colleagues. Arguments can start at any time, for any reason, and normally involve the raising of voices. If severe enough, they may perhaps lead to physical violence, but must always contain at least two parties, and always involve a head to head battle – much like a boxing ring, where you have opponent one vs. opponent two, and the aim of the “match” is for one opponent to win, by subduing the other.

The stakes are continually raised, with each opponent adding ammunition to their arsenal by using hurtful, cruel, or detrimental comments to make the other back down. Listen to this example conversation and see if you recognise it.

Mum: Why don't you ever clean your room? It's disgusting, I can't believe you never clean it, I do everything for you, you're so lazy, all I ask is that you clean your room once in a while.

Child: You're so unfair mum. I'm busy with school work, I don't have time to do it, and anyway, what do you do during the day? Nothing. All you do is sit here, while dad's at work earning money.

Mum: What? You ungrateful girl. I brought you into this world. I look after you, I feed you, I clothe you, I house you...

Child: No you don't, dad pays for everything; and anyway, I didn't ask to be born, just leave me alone.

Mum: You wait till your dad hears about this! You are grounded for a week; no going out for you after school. You will come home and do your homework straight away.

Child: (now crying with anger) Why? You can't make me, I won't do it, you can't make me!

Mum: (determined) I can, and I will, and if you keep on like that you'll get no dinner tonight either.

Child: Fine, I don't want dinner! In fact, I don't ever want to see you again, I hate you!

Mum: Don't speak to me like that.

Child: I'll speak to you any way I want, I hate you.

Result: Mum slams the door and leaves the child crying, whilst she goes into the living room trembling with rage, and starts crying herself.

Extreme example, or not?

Arguments can be about many things, as we have said already. Just this morning my girlfriend started an argument with me about something so trivial it isn't worth mentioning, but it is!

Her: Why do you always brush your teeth before breakfast?

Me: Because it makes my mouth feel fresh.

Her: It's a total waste of time, it doesn't work; you should always brush your teeth after breakfast.

Me: Why, what's it got to do with you, I'm 36 years old; if I want to brush my teeth before breakfast I can.

Her: Ok, I was just saying it's stupid, but every time I want to sit down with you at breakfast you're always doing something else. I can't stand it. Why don't you just sit down and eat breakfast with me? It's the one time we can spend together during the day.

Me: What's brushing my teeth got to do with spending time with you? Can't I just have a moment of peace in the morning without you going on all the time?

Her: I'm not going on all the time, it's just you're so selfish.

Me: Selfish, who's selfish? It's you who's the selfish one, because you won't let me enjoy my breakfast in peace.

Her: Silence

Result: Both leave in the morning without resolving the argument, with both parties now not speaking to each other. Lots of negative thinking about the other person during the day.

What was the argument really about? Teeth brushing? Breakfast? Selfishness? It doesn't really matter. What

matters, is we both failed to notice how the argument was escalating (*increase in extent or intensity*). You see, arguments start out over something trivial; but as both parties are engaged in head to head combat with only words as their weapons, they have to resort to other strategies, especially if they feel as if they are losing. That is when the personal attacks start. From slight insults to full on personality assaults.

Opponents will use anything at their disposal to win the argument. Why? Because we all want to win. We all think we are in the right, and won't give in. The original topic of the argument is rarely the last.

In the previous example, we have gone from teeth brushing to selfishness in less than one minute. We have actually used other things that annoy us about the other to win the argument, resulting in hurt feelings on both sides.

Arguments are destructive, whatever the topic. In the end, there can never be a winner, as someone always has to lose. More often than not, they are started as a result of frustration (*the feeling that accompanies an experience of being thwarted in attaining your goals*), where you wish to do (or wish another to do) something, and someone else goes against you. We become upset at their refusal to comply, and begin to feel angry. We can't understand why they would go against us, as we are clearly in the right!

If we look at this carefully, we will see that it doesn't matter who is in the right; it becomes a battle of words, with the sole objective of winning. But no one will ever truly win. All that the argument achieves is the loser (*the person who has been beaten into submission*) feels not only bad about themselves, but also likes the winner a little less.

Arguments are pointless

Once we can see that arguments are pointless, we can start to move on. Some people say that arguing is good for us, that it releases "bad energy," or "clears the air;" but when two people each want to get their point across, an argument won't solve it. You may as well put them in a boxing ring; because they *are* fighting, but using words instead of fists. In a fist fight the winner is the one who knocks his opponent down; the same applies with a verbal argument. Someone always gets hurt.

Arguments can never be constructive; otherwise they would be called a discussion. It is two ideas, two thoughts, battling head to head in all out war, until one idea is the conqueror. This could be between a couple arguing about whose turn it is to do the washing up, or a scientist and a priest arguing about whether Man evolved, or was created. They do not want to hear the other person's side, they just want to win.

By interacting with the other person on the same level (i.e. shouting) all we are doing is creating more tension. It may feel like a release, but it can also be damaging to a relationship of any kind. I prefer to think of an argument as a loss of control, where we "say things we don't really mean." Although what has usually happened, is a break down in communication, and over time, small things that annoyed us have gradually built up, until we can no longer store up these feelings and let loose with all guns blazing! That is why seemingly irrelevant things are brought up during an argument.

If we deal with small issues every day in the form of a discussion, where one party is actively listening to the other without interruption, it allows the person to vent in a non-destructive way, and does not seek to attack and counter-attack. Resolution comes about in a much swifter, and altogether more satisfactory manner for the benefit of both parties.

Vent

1. Activity that frees or expresses creative energy or emotion

Think of venting as a way to express how you feel without engaging the other person. A way of letting yourself say what needs to be said; but the energy is directed over the head of the other person, not directly at them. You are letting someone know have an important point to make, but you don't want them to respond. You just want to let them know how you feel.

It doesn't have to be with raised voices either. You are more likely to get someone to listen to you with a normal tone. When you have finished, allow the other person to vent, and actively listen. Do not interrupt, do

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

not justify, criticize, or offer solutions. Just listen. It's that simple.

On the other hand, you have to begin to notice what makes you angry all the time. Why do you always want to argue? Start to notice yourself in the moment when you enter an argument, and notice how you feel, and what you are thinking. Stop and ask yourself, "How important is this to me?" and "why is it important?"

The key to stopping arguments is *listening*. The reason most arguments start is one person feeling aggrieved, or wounded by a perceived attack on them, and instantly retaliating. The end result is the same as in all physical attacks. There *will* be casualties.

No one can ever win an argument
Don't bother starting them

[Back to Index](#)

Army

1. *A permanent organization of the military land forces of a nation or state*
2. *A large number of people united for some specific purpose*

There are plenty of advertisements on television and the press encouraging you to “be the best” or “have an exciting new career”, or “do something challenging in your spare time”. But what does it mean to be in the army (when I talk about army, I am including the navy and the air force)? For sure, it’s exciting! Who wouldn’t want to carry around a gun, fly about in jet planes at the speed of sound, or fire missiles? It beats regular work for a living. You get to wear combat clothes, you are powerful; and best of all, you get respect.

Who gets the kind of respect a soldier does? People do what you say; they obey your commands. No one respects a builder, a plumber, or an office clerk just because of the job they do. Why? The reason you get respect as a soldier, is because you bring fear into everyone’s lives. You bring the option of death if they do not comply! And it feels good to have that kind of power in your hands, doesn’t it?

Yesterday you were a street sweeper no one paid any attention to, and today you are the most powerful man in the world. You wear your badge with pride. You are important. You are someone who demands respect. But who are you without your gun? Who are you without the thousands of armed men by your side? Who are you without the bombs that can kill or maim thousands in one go? No one.

I wonder why you want go join the army? Is it a deep sense of wanting to protect humanity from evil people, or wanting to do something “worthwhile” for your country? Let’s talk about the sort of people who join.

Well, it’s mainly men who join up, especially for the fighting – women just haven’t got the killer instinct like men have. Women are programmed to create and to nurture, not destroy; so they make bad front line troops. So are these men committed to peace? Are they men of great learning and awareness – independent thinkers? No, of course not.

I don’t like generalising too much, but I would say that the average soldier is quite aggressive (required), lacks self-esteem as an individual, has no awareness of himself in the world, is of fairly low education, is able to be moulded into what ever the army requires, will follow orders without questions, and above all, is willing to kill anybody his commanding officer says “kill.”

High ranking officers are another breed. They are men who have education, but have been conditioned by their families and universities into believing are “fighting for a righteous cause,” “for queen and country” and all that sentimental ideology, and will put across a convincing intellectual case for everything they are doing.

Let’s go into this more deeply, shall we? Do you know what it is to be brainwashed (*subjected to intensive forced indoctrination resulting in the rejection of old beliefs and acceptance of new ones*)? It doesn’t seem possible that a modern civilisation would brainwash its citizens, but that is exactly what the army does. They remove any trace of the compassionate, loving man, and replace him with a killing machine that follows orders; and follow orders they must.

Can you imagine the chaos on the front line if people used their own judgement as to whether to kill a man? No, the soldier must conform; there’s no time to think. Kill or be killed. “It’s him or you,” you are told in training. “Who’s it going to be soldier?” “Him, Sir, Yes Sir!”

Does this not seem strange to you, that your employer would want to break your mind into thinking only what he wants you to think? If you work for a computer company, or at a book shop, would you expect your boss to scream and shout orders at you incessantly? Would you expect your boss to break you and recondition you to doing exactly what was wanted even if it went against everything you were? I don’t think so.

Humans do not have a biological predisposition to murdering other human beings in war; it has to be taught. You are forced to overcome any feelings of compassion and empathy for others, and do exactly what you are told. This is a job unlike any other.

I met a couple of ex-soldiers a few years ago, and I mentioned to them that they were just killing machines. They were upset when I mentioned this, and said that wasn’t what modern day soldiering was about. Yes, they would kill if necessary, but their job was much more complex than that. They told me about intelligence work and peacekeeping work etc. They firmly believed that they had not been conditioned and that in a modern army unit, whilst there were orders, they were openly encouraged to think like an individual.

But individuals are not what makes an army strong though. There is a clear chain of command, where the

thinking is done at the top, and filters its way down through the various ranks until you get to the private.

If you are a soldier in the army reading this, you may feel angry that I have misrepresented you, and you feel you are doing everything in a good cause – but whose cause? Humanity's? I don't think any person would agree that armies are working in the interest of humanity. Maybe it's for your country, because you "love your country so much," but remember many people have gone to war believing were right. You don't think millions of german soldiers would have gone to war if they didn't believe they were right. You may believe you have "right" on your side, but whose right is it? God's? Your leader's? Hitler convinced everyone he was right. People believed him. They joined the army and they killed because they believed it was "right."

But people who join armies do not know right from wrong. How can you? You are not allowed to think for yourself. In some countries, soldiers who refuse to carry out orders are summarily shot to make an example of them; and show the rest of the troops must obey. Some soldiers have decided mid-battle that it wasn't right to keep killing people and have decided to desert, or refuse to fight. They found out what it was like to go against orders. Shot or imprisoned.

Armies must have discipline. They must have absolute obedience, or they fall apart, and the only way to make homo sapiens – the most intelligent species on earth – obey every order you give, is to break his mind, and give him a new set of beliefs that are in line with every other soldiers. Complete mindcontrol.

Right

1. Anything in accord with principles of justice

Foreign governments often intervene in what they call "rogue" countries, sending in the army to overthrow the government by the use of military force. They believe they are in the right. On first examination this seems to be fair. A lunatic despot brutally murdering people from his own country? Surely that needs intervention. If we kill him and his cronies, that will help the people return to modern life. After all, we in the democratic countries cannot sit idly by and watch people being murdered; so we go in with all guns blazing with right on our side. We kill and we maim in the name of freeing the people, but we seem to forget, that in the act of freeing people from such brutality, we ourselves have become brutal. There is an old expression that says "the ends never justify the means."

When the atomic bomb was dropped on hiroshima and nagasaki, that signalled the end of the second world war. We stopped the war by showing we could be more brutal than the japanese could ever conceive. We dropped those bombs to stop more people being killed and here we are in 2006 with just as many wars raging around the globe.

Think about it. Has sending in the army – even if we believed we were right – solved anything? Maybe temporarily, but until people understand their own minds, and start valuing all forms of life on this planet, there will always be someone, somewhere, who believes he is right, causing suffering. Violence always creates more violence, no matter who is in the right. In the end, it doesn't matter who is right; innocent people will always die as a result.

Do you think the pilots who dropped the bomb on hiroshima believed they were right to do so, or do you think they had just become brainwashed killing machines on a voyage of destruction? Obviously they were conditioned as soldiers into obeying orders, but they must also have had a feeling that what they were doing was right. That the act of dropping the bomb would save more people than it killed. Except as usual it killed innocent people who probably believed their country was in the right!

The thing about armies is that they must detach from recognising the right of the individual to life. They must see the man as an enemy, not a human being, and in doing so, remove the personal responsibility for their deaths. Imagine will you for a moment, that instead of killing the 100,000 people by dropping the bomb on them, the soldier went round and killed the same number of people in his own country – house by house, street by street, executing every one of them. What sort of man would he be then? A monster? Inhuman? The worst serial killer on the planet?

He would be reviled by all, and people would be sickened by these acts of violence. But give him a uniform, a flag, and the blessing of the government, and he becomes a hero. Please think about this carefully

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

for a moment because it is of the utmost importance. In my mind there is no difference; the only difference is that he killed people from his own country, not a foreign country, and nobody said he could.

What detachment enables a government to send people like you and I to war, call us soldiers, and get us to kill in their name? They sanction the deaths of thousands of people yet they are not called to account. They are the ones in power, and they send you to die for them. For what? Freedom? For who?

**

As a species we have failed consistently. It is by pure chance we have managed to survive this long; but with the invention of nuclear weapons it could all be over for us in less than a day. Us, the planet, the animals and the birds. Have we not learnt anything from the past? Of course not! The present is the present and people still want power and control over others. Until we shift our thinking that will never change. There will always be a new hitler to replace the old one. Hitler is just an example, but he embodies all men seeking to dominate, and overcome others, through an idea. An idea that needs an army to spread its message.

Tell me, did mahatma gandhi need an army to spread his message; one of peace and love? No, you don't need a gun for that. You don't need soldiers. You don't need weapons of mass destruction, you just need a voice. Armies are only despatched when the message needs reinforcement with the threat of death. So although we have talked about governments and powerful men controlling the army, they would be nothing without *you*.

You are the army, you are the trained killer. You are the one who is brainwashed into obeying orders. You. The human being who has spent millions of years evolving into what you are today. Without you there could be no genocide, no destruction, no terror, and no murder. You cause it. You who join the army in person or support it in name.

You have a wonderful brain, and an amazing body; don't let it be used by powerful controlling men as a machine to rain destruction on the whole world. Stay as an individual, an independent thinker; and remember that the ends can never justify the means; and right is purely subjective.

If none of you allow yourselves to be brainwashed, where would the powerful men be then? You make them powerful. You give them the ability to threaten others. You are no better than the murderer who kills innocent people in his home town. There is no "cause," there is no "enemy," only humans; and if only you took time to get to know them, you would find out that they're exactly like you.

[Back to Index](#)

Attachment

1. *A feeling of affection for a person or an institution*

As humans, we can't help feeling attached to people, especially ones we love. And it comes as a great shock to our emotional systems when the people we love, die. It is as if we have been severed from them with a great blade, and although it is not visible, we feel it all the same. It is like having your heart wrenched out with a screwdriver; your stomach feels in knots, and your mind doesn't know where it is. I have never lost anyone I truly loved so you may feel that I am not in a position to discuss this with you, but let us explore it together nonetheless.

The thing is, we never really know we are attached until the bond is broken, do we? We know we love something (sorry someone) very much, but until they are taken away from us for good, we don't know how much it is going to hurt. And suddenly the knife cuts quickly and they are cast adrift from us. The end. Finality. The moment of truth. And just like a physical cut, we feel it deeply. It's like a part of us is missing. We can't explain it, but it is there with us every day, this sense of loss. But it's not grief as we know it. So how can we explain it?

Every day, we form attachments to the physical and the inanimate by means of which we have no words. Somehow we become "attached" to people at work, to the television, to our routine, to our bank account, our traditions, our home, our children, our partners, even to celebrities; but we don't know it is there. An invisible thread of emotional bonding has been created. It is almost as if we are somehow giving the object of our attachment an atom of our own being and it gives us one in exchange. So now we're kind of like blood brothers (*a male sworn (usually by a ceremony involving the mingling of blood) to treat another as his brother*), but there has been no ceremony.

The tree of attachment has taken root

And your life carries on. You are not aware of the attachment, but it is there, holding you to the object, making you feel comfortable and secure, freeing you from fear; and as the years pass by with no break in the attachment, the roots grow stronger; the mutual exchange of atoms becoming more frequent. "Life is good" you murmur to yourself. And indeed it is. One could almost say "perfect." The bonds are in place.

Except somebody forgot to tell you that nothing is forever, except perhaps, nothing. But you don't want to hear that. And even if someone does tell you that, there can be no fear can there? Your tree is firmly rooted into the ground and even the fiercest storm cannot uproot it. But the break in the attachment bond is not caused by a storm, it is caused by a knife, even though it is not wielded by man's own hand. And when it comes, it comes so suddenly, that nothing can prepare you for the consequences.

The doorbell rings.

Police: Mrs Smith, I'm afraid we have some bad news for you.

Mrs smith: What is it?

Police: Your husband was killed in a car accident today. I'm terribly sorry.

Mrs smith: Oh my god!

And the knife cut deep; and it felt like she had lost a part of herself (which indeed she had, as she had willingly given the other a part of her whole in order to buy security, confidence and freedom from fear). Thoughts started running through mrs smith's mind, she felt sick, she felt as though she was going to faint. Her head was filled with chaos. "I just need a minute" she said.

And it cuts and it cuts

My friend peter was a successful businessman. By the age of 38, he owned a small manufacturing company making garden furniture. Life hadn't been easy for peter; his parents both died young, and he had to start the business with next to nothing, but now he had 50 people working for him, and he made enough money to have bought his own home outright, and had a small holiday cottage in the south of France.

He may have been doing well for himself, but he didn't rest on his laurels. He was in the factory every day before the workers, and left after them every day. You wouldn't call him a workaholic; let's just say he was committed to his job.

He had never married, and had enjoyed a diverse range of girlfriends over the years. He wouldn't agree with me, but I'd say he was "married to his job!" But I used to like when he sometimes came to pick me up at the weekend in his open top sports car. I used to love how the girls would look at us as we purred along the open road, and through the high streets of the local towns. I really envied him.

Don't get me wrong, I was doing ok on my own, but I was still employed and just got paid a regular salary every week. "You should come and work for me" he often said. "You'd get a much better salary and maybe one day you could come and pick me up in your own sports car!" "Yeah dream on" I'd say.

I wasn't happy in my job but I had security and it paid the bills. I wasn't flash like him. I was happy with my life, although I could have done with going out with some of the girls he was getting!

I was used to getting calls on my mobile from peter, they usually started with "Hey wassssuppp" in the style of the american beer commercial, and he normally wanted to meet up in the evening for a game of squash, or a game of pool and a beer; but when the phone rang this time, he sounded different, shaky even.

"Hi peter," I said. "How you doing? Are we out for a beer tonight?"

"Oh, alan," he said "I've really fucked up. I've done a really stupid thing."

My mind raced to think what it was. Perhaps he had got one of his one night stands pregnant. He continued.

"You know I told you about that big contract in the usa?"

"Yeah," I replied, "what about it?"

"It's fallen through."

"Oh fuck! How bad?"

"Real bad," he said. "This was going to be a perfect deal, but now it's sunk."

"Oh, shit, how much are you in for?"

"All of it," he said. "I took on more staff, bought and paid for the timber already and half the stock is in the despatch bay ready to go."

"But it's only one contract," I said, "surely that's not enough to sink you?"

"I think so," he replied. "We haven't been doing so well recently; I didn't tell you because I didn't want to worry you. We've been making a loss for the last two years, and borrowing money, and now that the contract's fallen through, the banks want their money back."

"But your houses etc. they're safe, right? I mean, it is a limited company." I said helpfully.

"Unfortunately not. You see, the only way they would make the last loan was if I put up personal guarantees, and that included my houses."

"But they won't kick you out, surely? Anyway, those banks are bastards!" I said not so helpfully.

So it was. Peter lost his garden furniture business, and he lost his house, and his holiday house in the south of france. He even sold his sports car to raise money.

He stopped answering my calls, but I kept on calling; he was my friend after all. But he didn't seem keen on going out for a drink, or a game of pool any more. In fact he was becoming more reclusive by the day. Holed up in a one bedroom rented apartment in the wrong end of town. One day I went over to see him – he looked terrible.

"Don't worry peter, you'll get it back. You built a business before, and you were good at it." I said.

"It's all gone, alan. All of it. The houses and the car. I haven't got a penny. I'm stuck in a dead end job and can barely make rent every month, I fucking hate my life."

"If you need some money..." I offered.

"What, take money off you? piss off; I would never take money from you?"

"Ok!" I said, "but the offer still stands."

"What I can't understand is how I'll keep going," he carried on "I mean, I'm 39 now, and I haven't got a pot to piss in." I now work in an office pushing paper; I'll never be able to afford another house, and I loved my car; I now I have some crappy old thing that keeps breaking down."

"But it isn't so bad" I said. "At least you've got a job; loads of people in this city are unemployed. Perhaps you should stop feeling sorry for yourself. It was only a car. And you have a roof over your head" I

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

said, becoming a little too animated.

“What? I don’t have to listen to this shit. Get out. Don’t you understand? I lost everything. Everything! And now look at me. Get out.”

So I left. And I stopped calling eventually. I just couldn’t understand why peter had taken it so badly. He still had more than lots of other people. He had a job, he had food, and an apartment. Just because he used to have a bigger house and more money is no cause to be that bloody miserable! At least he’s got his health. And I put peter out of my mind.

Recently I came to understand what had happened. You see, there was nothing wrong with peter’s new life, just the way he thought about it. He worked in an office, he got paid, he had somewhere to live. Some people might think that was a dream job, but no, he had become physically attached to the business, to the car, to the money, to the houses, and as he lost them, the bond was broken with the blade of the knife – bringing fear and reality rushing back to his mind.

In exchange for peace of mind and security, he had given a little piece of himself to each of these objects, and they had taken up one space of his whole. Do you understand? So instead of having 100 “atoms” of life, he now had 96 atoms of wholeness plus one of car, one of money, one of business, one of home; and the human needs 100 atoms to live life in balance. As he gave away some of himself in exchange for these things he has been left feeling out of balance. That is why no office job, run down apartment, or old car can now satisfy him.

He will not feel back in balance until the pieces that were cut so brutally from him are replaced, exactly as they were. And he will spend his whole life scouring the planet to find those pieces he lost of himself. Desperately searching and searching, tormenting himself on a fruitless journey to find the lost atoms.

Making your list

On a brighter note! There is a way out for those of you who are beginning to get depressed reading this story; but it is going to take some careful attention on your part. You are going to have to write a list, where you start at the top with 100 atoms. Next, you are going to take away one atom for each unit of wholeness you have given away and exchanged for something material or intangible.

When you have finished your list, you should end up with the number of wholeness units that have been exchanged. So if your list now equals 85, that means that there are 15 units that you have given away in exchange for something you desired, or wished for. If you lose them, or they are taken from you, that is the shortfall you are going to have to make up; otherwise you will live a life of dissatisfaction, and constant longing until you get them back. But the knife is sharp; once it cuts, there is no going back.

Be careful what you give away of yourself in exchange for the temporary pleasure of security and freedom from fear

[Back to Index](#)

Awareness

1. *An alert cognitive state in which you are aware of yourself and your situation*

During the course of this book you will hear many references to love, empathy and compassion, which some of you might consider concepts (*an abstract or general idea inferred or derived from specific instances*), but are really just human emotions.

Many of you will be asking, “How do I find these emotions?” And some of you will not be interested in finding them, because you prefer to keep acting the way you do.

But these emotions are the key to the whole human condition. A key that doesn’t need spiritual guidance or a university education. A key we all possess, but may not be aware we have. A key that unlocks the true beauty of what it is to be human. But how do we get this key? As always, the answer lies in us. Deeply buried in some, already active in others; but it all starts with awareness. Awareness of self in action.

Have you ever looked at your hands? I mean *really* looked at your hands? Have you ever taken the time to examine them? Have you watched the way they move while you are looking at them? You can move your hands without having to consciously think “I will move my hands now,” they just move when you want them to!

Take a moment to look now. Move every finger individually. Look at your nails; have you ever wondered how they grow? Now move your wrist slowly in circles, and move your arm, all the time noticing that you are aware you are doing it, although you cannot see the thought that caused your arm to move.

Now, I would like you to try to relax, close your eyes when you’re ready, and imagine for a moment that you are sitting above yourself. Like an observer, just watching. Watch how the thoughts flow effortlessly through your mind, but don’t try to interact with them. Just watch for a moment. Now open your eyes, and come back to your environment. Did you notice anything? Maybe, maybe not.

We all have thoughts. Every moment of the day we are thinking about something; but have you ever stopped to wonder why you are thinking? What are the processes that make you think? What causes you to think the way you do?

Most of us just accept what we think. We think and act according to the way our brain has been wired, through conditioning, tradition, culture, media, or education; but how many of us stop to wonder why we think the way we do? What makes me think in ways that make me analyse, criticise, and judge all around me? “It’s just the way I am,” you say. But do you really know your own mind? Are you really aware that you are thinking and acting in a certain way, or are you just running on automatic pilot?

One of the greatest things humans have gained is consciousness, in which we are aware of ourselves, but it seems that most of us don’t know what it really means to be conscious.

A gorilla may look at a tree, but what does he see? He has no power of language to describe it; he has no mental concept of what a tree is. He may be able to visually recognise and differentiate different kinds of trees, but does he have the ability to look at the tree and think “I wonder how old that tree is, it is really beautiful”? Can he ponder the nature of his own existence, where he came from, what he is doing here, and what the meaning of life is, whilst looking at the tree?

According to everything we know (which isn’t that much), humans are the only species who have that ability, but of course, this may change in the future. It is an ability which is located somewhere in space; inside the brain, but also without. A clear space in which to play with ideas; to bring up mental images, and use language to describe them. To put words together which enable us to ask questions of ourselves; to be aware of life all around us.

Unlike most animals, we are not fixed into patterns which limit us to just sensing danger, seeking out food, and procreating. We can hear the sound of a bird singing and wonder what type of bird it is, then remark upon how beautiful its song is.

Let me ask you a question. Have you ever watched yourself walking? Do you notice how one foot naturally falls in front of the other, how your arms gently swing, or how delicately, or hard you walk? Probably not, because these are activities you can perform without even consciously having the thought. You may think, “I will go for a walk,” but you do not consciously think “Right, I must put one foot in front of the other, paying careful attention to bending my toes at specifically the right time, and lifting one foot off the ground. Oh, and I’d better lift my knee a little.” That would be ridiculous. If you had to be aware of every movement, you would go crazy trying to stand upright!

But that is precisely what I want you to do the next time you go out for a walk. Use the power of your

consciousness to notice how your foot bends at just the right time. How your knee lifts, ever so slightly. How you change the way you walk when you start to hurry. Becoming aware of the most basic bodily functions will start to give you an awareness of yourself. If you don't know your own body, how will you be aware of your effect on others?

If you play sport of any kind, notice how your body can move in the most amazing ways. If you play tennis, notice how your arm comes up just at the right time. How your eye sees the ball, and the racket moves to just the right location, all without you consciously having to think. "I must start lifting my arm now and rotating my racket to just the correct angle. Oh, and I must move my body to the right position, and now I must move my feet." If you had to think of all those different movements your opponents would have scored a point before you had time to think, "I must start..."

Our bodies are amazing. Our minds are amazing We are amazing.

Can you even start to comprehend the complexity that makes up a human being? I certainly can't. From the bone structure that allows us to walk upright, to the muscles and tendons that allow us to move in complex ways; to the heart that beats incessantly in your chest and keeps you alive.

Can you comprehend how the body instantly attempts to clot the blood when you cut yourself and heals the area of skin that was cut, or how the body signals to the brain that it is hungry, and the brain sends that signal to your conscious mind triggering the thought "I'm hungry, I must eat something?"

These processes are automatic. Processes designed to keep our species alive, so why would you notice them? You're much too busy to worry about how your body works. So you keep on going until finally one day the body cannot take any more, and expires, taking you and your consciousness with it.

We are the most technically advanced of all the species on this planet. We may not be the strongest or the fastest, but we are definitely the most adaptable; using our large brains to think our way out of almost any problem.

Do you not think you are amazing? Do you not think that the chance you even exist, was so slim, yet you are here? From a single sperm and an egg, you grew, slowly at first, then more rapidly, inside your mother's womb; blissfully unaware that anything was going on, while the process of life was taking place right inside you, growing bones, muscles, skin, and organs. Until finally, in the ninth month, you were ejected through your mother's vagina, and gasped your first breath of air. And here you are! Alive. A member of the most intelligent species on the planet, and you didn't have to do a thing.

You and I are the luckiest people on the planet. Able to experience such beauty in life, and also able to use language to describe it. You are not like anyone else on the planet, although you may look similar. You are an individual. An individual capable of one of the wonders of the world, conscious thought.

So where does that leave us? Oh yes, as adults. And what do we do with this wonderful chance we got? We fight, we destroy, we smoke, and drink ourselves into oblivion, we pursue our own goals at whatever cost to everyone else, and we are full of our own self-importance. We control, we subdue, we desire, we take, we enslave, and we butcher. That's the thanks that nature gets for giving us life.

If nature had a consciousness it would have to wonder: "Why did I give life to this species who are so intent on destroying themselves, each other, and nature itself? What was the point of all the billions of years of evolution on this planet, when one species is intent on total destruction of the earth in such a short time? Do they not actually want to be alive? Aren't they satisfied with this planet full of abundance? I think giving life to these humans was the biggest mistake I made!"

We really are a waste of time (and what a long time the earth has been around for). What do you think? We have done nothing to further the planet. All we have done is take, take, take. We have given nothing back. We have used the earth as our personal resource centre, and we have left only death in our wake. Sorry, am I being too hard on us all? After all, we have discovered fire, invented the wheel, and have even flown to the moon. Show me one stupid animal that's managed to do even one tenth of what we have done!

Let's go back to these great machines we have at our disposal (our bodies). Take an average day you go through, and think of all the amazing things your body has enabled you to do. We may have developed technology, but without our bodies, the technology would be useless. Cars help us to travel long distances

easily, but think of all the things your body has to do during the drive. The legs for the pedals, the arms for the steering wheel, and the brain to be aware of other cars.

Computers may take over all the mundane processes for us in the future, but if the computer is doing all the work, what will we be doing? Maybe just thinking of new and better ways to destroy our enemies and ourselves?

The most amazing thing I love about my body is the way I can use my mind to choose different vegetables, prepare them in a way that sends pleasure signals to my brain, swallow them and send them down a tube I can't see, to a thing called the stomach. This in turn lets me feel full, and uses acids – strong enough to burn the skin – to break down the food into chemical substances that it (the body) needs to stay alive. It then excretes the waste products as either liquid or solid. Now that's amazing! But how often do we think about this whilst going to the toilet?

It's fine when everything is functioning normally, but wait until you get food poisoning and suffer sickness and diarrhoea! Then you pay careful attention to going to the toilet. In fact, you can generally think of nothing else. That's the thing with the human body, it can take most of what we throw at it, but when it breaks down, we are powerless. The most cruel humans on the planet are reduced to nothing when their body is sick. The wonderful consciousness we have can only think about the pain we are in. The body goes into self-protect mode and tries to heal itself the best it can. Sometimes it is successful, sometimes not.

A short story about waking up

A young man goes out drinking every night with his friends, and he is on top of the world. He's got a good job, plenty of money, he feels powerful; like nothing could ever touch him. He struts his stuff with the ladies, showing off his designer clothes, partying the night away; having sex with as many women as he can. He's cool. All his friends admire him. All his friends want to be him.

One night, he leaves the bar, drunk as usual, and he and his friends are in high spirits – they've had great night. He takes his keys out of his pocket, and all of them pile into the car. He turns the music up loud, and drives off. It's an easy country road home, never any traffic at 2.00 am. They are all laughing and joking, he turns his head for a second to shout something to his friend and... He wakes up. His body is covered in plaster, tubes sticking out of him everywhere, surrounded by people in white coats.

"What happened?" he asks. "What am I doing here?"

"You had a car accident," one of the doctors replies.

"What about my friends?"

"I'm very sorry, they were all killed."

In this situation, like so many tragic events around the world, the dawning or realisation of what has happened comes too late. The events have already taken place and it's too late to go back. One faculty we are not born with, is the ability to turn back the clock, though I'm sure many wish we were. If only he had had the awareness of self; the awareness that says "I am drunk. If I get in that car, there is a high chance I may kill, not only myself, but my friends too."

Why does this awareness come to people when their bones are broken, or when they are lying sick, or dying? What if people could find this awareness before it was too late? People talk about developing self-awareness, but it is no more complicated than watching yourself in action. We have already discussed paying careful attention to watching how your body moves, but what I would like you to pay careful attention to now is your language.

Language

1. *A systematic means of communicating by the use of sounds or conventional symbols*
2. *The cognitive processes involved in producing and understanding linguistic communication*

It may be fair to say, that without the development of language skills, we may never have been able to develop awareness. Visual representations in the mind are associated with words we project into our

consciousness. How would we have been able to ponder the meaning of life, if we had no words with which to describe the words “the meaning of life!” I know it is a difficult subject to think about, but consider this. Without language, we would not have the ability to think the way we do now.

So language is an essential part of awareness; not just in how we speak to others, but how we speak to ourselves. How often do we listen to how we speak? Have you ever said something in anger and couldn’t believe the words actually came out of your mouth? Do you notice if you are aggressive, insulting, even plain boring, or if your personality is intolerable? Do you notice when people dislike you for what you say? The content is not important; it is the noticing that is important.

Next time you are speaking to someone, try to practice this. As you are speaking, allow yourself to become aware that you are above yourself, watching. Not interacting with the speech; merely observing what is being said, and try to catch what you are actually saying. Notice the content, notice the manner in which you speak, notice the tone; and try to see how it feels to be on the receiving end of a conversation with yourself. Try to listen to whether you are angry, superior, demanding, critical, or boastful; and ask yourself this question: “Would I like to be on the receiving end of this conversation?”

We need to become aware of how we interact with other people and start to take account of how others may be feeling when we are talking. Only then will we be able to modify our thinking and our behaviour;

As you go through your day, do you ever consider how things work? Have you any idea how the electricity is generated that feeds your endless requirements, or how water magically arrives at your tap? What about where the faeces, urine, and toilet paper goes when you flush the toilet? How about all the waste you generate every day, neatly put into a bag, and throw into your bin ready for collection? You may not think these things are important, but they are highly significant to developing awareness.

Let us be clear why we are trying to develop awareness. It is not so we can reach a higher spiritual plane; it is to help us improve the way we exist on this planet. Simple as that. There is no point in saying “Oh, yes, I’m very self-aware,” and carrying on doing the things you were doing before. This is self-awareness in action. By being aware, you are noticing how you effect, not only other people, but the other species we share this planet with, not forgetting the planet itself; and by developing this awareness, you start to tread a little more carefully, instead of blasting through life only concerned with what *you* can get from it.

I am not going to preach to you about what you should think is important, but when you start to think about someone else apart from yourself and your “needs,” you will begin to notice yourself becoming more deeply interested in the planet you live on.

Talking of planets. Have you any idea where the earth is? No, neither have I! Scientists have been studying the universe with telescopes, and sending probes out to mars and the sun, but we have no better idea of where we are than we had last year, or the century before that. You see, space is just that – space. It is a concept that blows your mind. How did we arrive here? How is the universe made up? Why do we exist? Where are we? These are philosophical and scientific questions that will probably keep humans busy for many years to come.

But you don’t care about that, do you? All you care about is earning money, having kids, getting a good education for them, buying a nice house with a nice garden, having drinks at the pub, buying the latest gadgets and going on holiday. Fair?

What if you are a criminal? All you care about is hurting people, stealing from them, and generally making yours and everybody else’s life a misery. Fair?

What if you are a dictator? All you care about is killing people, controlling them, lining your own pockets with their hard earned money, starting wars, and generally making everybody else’s lives a misery. Fair?

What if you are a politician? All you care about is staying in power, sending your troops off to some far flung land to free the people, organising the country, and possibly the planet, according to your ideas, having affairs, and generally not doing much for anybody except yourself. Fair?

What I am trying to help you understand here is that in order to have true awareness, you have to notice your actions, and you have to try to place them in context with the other people you have to live with. If you are a criminal who hurts people, and steals their money, awareness will not come when you go to jail. Awareness comes when you are in the middle of the act, and you suddenly start watching yourself, without judgement. It may even be a surreal experience as you watch yourself knocking down an old lady and stealing her bag, suddenly thinking: “What am I doing?”

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

If you don't get that feeling, you will keep doing what you're doing. It doesn't even have to be anything so extreme. As you are running the tap on full whilst brushing your teeth, you may just notice thinking: "I am letting all that water just run down the drain. It has travelled a long way to get here, and in an instant, I have let it go, without even using it." A murderous dictator will no longer be a murderous dictator when he stops and catches himself in the middle of an act, and notices himself thinking: "Why am I doing this to all these people? I don't want to do this anymore."

As we have discussed, awareness is the key that opens up the doorway to love, compassion, and empathy. It's so simple, once you start noticing yourself in action. For me, it was a strange feeling too, when I started to notice things around me that had previously not only been unimportant, but were completely out of my awareness. I was aware I had needs, and I wanted them fulfilled. Now.

I didn't care about my fellow man. The furthest I spread the net was perhaps to my girlfriend, mum and dad, and maybe a couple of close friends. But even then, I was the most important thing on the planet, just as you are now. "Look after number one," my mum used to say, and that I did. I travelled through life without a care, except how much money I was going to earn that month, and what I could spend it on. Nothing mattered to me in the way it does now. I don't think I was a bad person, I just couldn't see past myself.

But I had two key awareness moments that sparked an inquisitiveness off in me, that now means I silently question everything I do, to judge its impact on others; not in an obsessive manner, just casually, almost as if it was in my peripheral vision. The first was standing at traffic lights in Sydney, Australia in 2000. I casually dropped my cigarette butt, as millions of other people do.

"Pick that up; don't you know it takes over a hundred years for that to breakdown in the environment?" my girlfriend said.

Normally I would have got angry and said "What's it got to do with you? Leave me alone," but this time something changed. It was as if I could hear myself going to say the words before they came out of my mouth; and in that noticing, I realised I had changed.

"Sorry, I didn't know that," I said, and picked it up.

The second was in Thailand in 2002. I was looking for a book to read in the English bookshop, and I saw one called "beyond violence." I was somehow attracted to it; I think I just liked the title; and unsure if it was a novel or not, I bought it and started reading. I couldn't put it down. It was a book about the nature of human violence, a book that made me incredibly sad, and in that moment I started to notice myself thinking: "This can't be right, how can we go around killing each other all the time? For what?"

For me, awareness has been a process, much like life is. I slowly noticed things around me more and more; people, animals, the planet. It's not as if I deliberately wanted to become more "in touch with myself," I just couldn't help noticing the way I talked and dealt with people; how sometimes I was so crude, angry, or full of my own self-importance. And I began to dislike this person I was noticing – so I changed.

Awareness is not about becoming perfect. It is about starting to notice more important things than the number of credit cards in your wallet, the car you drive, the power you have, the control and dominance you have over others, and your status in society; and realising you are only here for a short time.

You may have a big brain, but one day soon, that brain, along with your body will stop functioning. That will be it. You can believe in reincarnation or heaven all you like, but your body, and therefore you, will be no more. Like a car that can't be fixed, that goes to the scrapheap – that's where you're going!

Awareness is waking up. Waking up to what you are – a wonderful human being. Alive today. Able to enjoy life, and share that pleasure with the rest of the world. Bringing love instead of war; compassion instead of terror; empathy instead of hatred.

Step outside yourself for one moment now. Enjoy watching yourself in action. You may not like what you see when you first look down upon yourself, but after recognition comes understanding, and with understanding comes change; but with change there also comes resistance. All you have to do is accept the change instead of resisting it! Your new found awareness of yourself will not only be a shift in the right direction for you, but you will be helping all of Mankind. You may not believe it right now, but if you look closely enough at yourself and your current actions, you will see the way forward.

[Back to Index](#)

B

Bank

1. *A financial institution that accepts deposits and channels the money into lending activities*

It's hard to imagine living in a world without banks, isn't it? After all, where would you keep all those hard-earned pennies? Not under the mattress for a nasty burglar to steal I hope! Thanks to our money-centric society, and the value everyone places upon money (especially those without it), we need to keep the money safe.

So we give it to the nice bank on the high street with the friendly advertising, and open an account. They are all smiles as they go through the simple process of checking how much money you've got in other places, how much you earn, if you own your own home, and then the computer sneakily goes off to check your credit rating – which these days is the real measure of who you are. The computer returns an answer after some moments.

"Your application has been approved!" the nice employee tell you.

"Hooray!" you cheer (on the inside). "But what does that mean?"

"Well it means you get to put your money into this nice bank every month. We will give you a card to access it, and that's it. Your money will be kept in a big safe for you to access at any time. Thank you for choosing to bank with friendly bank Ltd. Goodbye."

So that's the basics of banking folks. Earn money, put it somewhere safe. Get it when you need it. The End.

Unfortunately, that's not what banking is about, is it? You see, if they just kept your money in the bank, how would *they* earn any money? They wouldn't be able to pay their rent, heating, or electric bills, and they couldn't pay the staff. So how do they make money? Well, they lend it, pure and simple, and for the pleasure of receiving the money, which is actually your money, the borrowers pay back what they owe, plus interest (*a fixed charge for borrowing money; usually a percentage of the amount borrowed*).

Banks: Shylocks with nice suits

Typically, money lenders or loan sharks (including the famous shylock in shakespeare's merchant of venice) are always seen as ruthless, merciless, greedy men who lend money at excessive rates of interest, ready to beat you to a pulp for failing to pay the money back on time. Fortunately, the modern banks aren't like that at all. There is no violence, only men in smart suits, happy to help you with your money problem, politely informing you that you will lose your house if you don't keep up the repayments; or they will go through the courts to reclaim the money; and if you still can't pay, the bailiffs will be called to take away all your possessions; but there's no need to worry about that now, just sign here and the money will be in your account as quick as a flash.

You want the money, so you sign, getting steadily more excited as you know you'll soon be able to buy that new car, new tv, or just pay off another loan! It may well be that you have just signed up for a mortgage which means that soon you'll have your dream home (oh, and huge debt for the next 25 years).

But no one is forcing us to borrow the money, are they? The banks haven't got a gun to our heads. We want their money, which actually is everyone else's money, and they are happy to oblige, at a price. It's just business for them. But say you are like me, and after many years of being in a cycle of debt due to not being able to control your consumer impulses, finally realise that borrowing money just to buy more "stuff" is a complete waste of human life, and vow never to borrow money from a bank again, what do you do? You still have to have a bank account. You can't escape them. Why? Because you are scared to leave your money at home under the mattress. And anyway, the bank may pay you some interest back on the money you have invested with them.

The question is, what does the bank do with your money once you hand it across the counter? We know they don't just keep it in the safe! Without boring you with all the details, it basically works like this. You deposit money. The bank is then able to lend approx ninety percent of that money, whilst ten percent is kept in reserve (a requirement so that people can always access their money. Unless everyone came at the same time that is), the bank charge interest to the borrowers, and pay interest to the savers. Their profit is the difference between the two.

So who borrows money? Let's start with the individuals shall we? That's you and me. We borrow large

amounts of money to buy houses, and smaller amounts for general items we cannot afford. The loan for a house is called a mortgage (*a conditional conveyance of property as security for the repayment of a loan*) and the house you have bought is put up as security for the loan to buy it. If you keep up the monthly repayments (which may go up over the period of 25 years if interest rates are raised), you will eventually be the proud “owner” of a pile of bricks which are hopefully worth more than the price you paid! If you don’t keep up the repayments, the bank takes back the house. It’s a no lose situation for them, but it could be for you.

Last week, I logged onto a website that enables you to see your credit rating, and for £5.00, I found out it was neutral – neither good or bad. Armed with that information I set off to the high street to try to open an account. I couldn’t believe I was getting refused, and I didn’t even want to borrow any money. Whilst I do have a permanent job, I don’t pay any bills (as everything is provided by the college), and I have not had a permanent job or permanent home address for the past eight or nine years. So I am outside of what society considers to be the “norm,” and am now paying the price. Eventually the college wrote a letter stating I was employed and did not have any bills, and one building society has eventually given me a basic account which I can pay money in and take it out.

For the first time in my life I really felt like an outsider, but actually, it felt kind of good to be on the outside. You see, I believe that banking represents one of the great conformities of our time, and if you don’t conform you will be a social outcast, like me. So make sure you have a permanent job, have loads of bills in your name, borrow loads of money, and you can become a valued member of society.

Follow the mortgage dream

Who doesn’t dream of owning their own house, free from the tyranny of private landlords and government housing schemes? Owning your own house is the epitome of individual expression. I am an individual and this is my home. A home I have worked for. That I have chosen. That I have decorated. That I maintain. That I enjoy.

So we get a mortgage, exchange contracts, and we’re in. It’s a square box with a garden (or not if it’s a flat), large or small, furnished with all the modern gadgets, and we love it, because it’s ours. We admire it one more time, then it’s back to work to start paying for it. And work you must. Every day until it is paid, if we can wait that long. Normally the more money we earn and the more the house appreciates, the more we want to move to something bigger, so we get another mortgage and the cycle begins again. If we’re lucky we may have paid it off by the time we retire.

I too would like to follow the dream. I too would like to have the pleasure of a small space with a small garden, but the difference is, I will not borrow money to pay for it. Let me explain why. I do not want to be tied down to one job and one town. I am not a vagrant, but I do want to explore the world I live in. I want to enjoy the time I have on earth, and I want to contribute to society, but not necessarily in the same place. The only solution I have found so far is to rent privately in each town or country I am in, but that means having to find work that earns me enough to pay rent. If I can no longer work, I’ll be thrown out, after all, a landlord has bills to pay as well.

The question I want to put to you all is how do I, a hard worker, but someone who does not want to help the banking system continue to control the world, find a piece of land to call my own? I earn approximately £15,000 per year, and the average house price is approx £200,000 around here. Given that I can perhaps save maybe half per year (if I was to take no holidays), and have few bills to pay, it would take me over 26 years to save up for the house, and that’s forgetting that the house would probably go up in value. So even when I had eventually saved enough for the house at 2007 prices, I (a) would no longer have enough in 2033, and (b) I would be one year off retiring age, so I would find it hard to find work.

It’s a trap

So that’s me finished already. At 38 years old there is no chance for me to own my own piece of planet earth, that no one can evict me from, without conforming. In order for me to live peacefully in a nice part of the countryside, I have to conform. I have to get a credit rating. I have to get a mortgage. I have to borrow.

I can hear some of you saying: “Why don’t you just go out and earn the money like other people do? Why do you keep complaining about your lot, when the opportunity is there to make money? You just have to grasp it.” But earning large sums of money is the domain of commercial organisations, and as I want to do work to benefit humanity, I find myself at odds with their ethics. But that is not the issue here. What we are talking about is the control that banks have on our lives.

Having shelter is one of the basic human necessities. Having a mortgage isn’t, but we are encouraged to take one out. This has more to do with economics than making sure that all people have shelter. As usual it’s all about money, and money makes the world go round. It is essential to have somewhere to sleep, but as the monks know, it isn’t necessary to have a huge house with all the trappings of modern life. Somewhere clean, calm, and warm is all that is needed. The rest is just superficial.

So why can’t I just find a small piece of land somewhere that I could build a modest sustainable dwelling on and grow my vegetables? Because every piece of this planet is owned by someone; either privately, by the government, or by the king or queen! That’s incredible isn’t it? There is nowhere left to go. We are bound to cities and towns by houses, flats, and employment. The rest of the countryside is owned by farmers and landowners. What do you think about this?

Through human organisation and economic development, we have created a world where only a few people are in control. The rest of us must conform or face exclusion. I am a human being who doesn’t want to borrow money from the banks, and now I am placed in a difficult position, either get a mortgage, start a business that makes a lot of money fast, join a religious or other community, or rent privately. Are we not a community that shares the land equally?

Before you think I am getting into political ideology here, let me assure you I am not. I am merely suggesting that the way in which land is owned, in the west particularly, only seeks to divide us more, into rich and poor, and the have’s and the have not’s, when really richness or poorness is a state of mind. If you have even the most basic warm shelter that you keep clean, keep yourself well fed and watered, and have basic clothing, that is enough to satisfy the basic human needs. The other needs can be met by development of the mind, and in the development of human relationships. One thing materially wealthy people will never be able to understand is that true wealth will never have anything to do with how much money you have in the bank.

In this age of individual purchasing power, people have been encouraged to forget about the word, community. We buy land independently, and live independently, surrounding ourselves with gates, fences and walls. “Keep off my property!” people shout. “You are trespassing.” It makes me sad to think that this is how we have developed as a species. Jealously guarding our small piece of land.

The time has come when we the people re-engineer how we live, and break free from forced individualism to reform, not as an ideological community, but one that has the interests of others at heart. It is interesting to see the amish people in america, who originally came from holland, still living the simple way they did hundreds of years ago, refusing to use modern equipment and dressing in simple clothing. They also help each other immensely with everything.

Doing work that benefits others. Working together for a common goal, for the community, a society that cares as much for each other, as they do for themselves. It wouldn’t work in the cities though; most people don’t know who lives next to them let alone help them build a house! In the city, people just keep their heads down and get on with their own lives in as much isolation as possible, but that’s another story. I know we have not talked about a solution to this mortgage trap, or how we should move forward, but whilst the banks are in charge of all the money there can never be a solution.

As I see it, part of the solution involves the dismantling of the cities, and a return to the land, but unfortunately, humans aren’t co-operative enough to be able to do it without fighting over each square of grass. Territory disputes, as you may know, are one of the single biggest causes of war, apart from religion.

The one thing we forget, is that we are only on this earth for several years, yet we greedily attach ourselves to the land. But what will we do with it when we are dead? We don’t need it any more, but we try to hang on to it by passing it on to our family, maybe as a way of attempting to keep ourselves alive. Maybe we should think about why we really want it before we possess it.

Part 2: Companies. Where's your money going?

Banks also invest in companies they believe will make them a profit, and lend money to business start-ups, or businesses who want to expand, for which they charge interest. The only problem is, they are lending your money to companies you do not know. You have no idea what they make, what the impact on the environment is, or what the human rights impact will be. You may think that the textile industry in asia, which employs workers in terrible conditions, sometimes employs child labour, and has people working upwards of 12 hours a day is a disgrace. You may even belong to a campaign group to stop child labour, but all the while you are unwittingly supporting it, because the bank you put your money in is using it to invest in the very company you wish to stop!

The banks say they have ethics policies in place, but truthfully how many banks would not lend to companies that promise a good return? So what if the workers live in poor conditions? So what if the companies are using up the earth to make consumer products to keep us addicted? If it makes good business sense then the banks will lend, no question about it. Some of the worst regimes in the world are supported by banks. I can't list them all here, but you don't have to look very closely to find out who. Money finances pain and suffering.

Banks all over the world are responsible for helping create the greedy species that we are, dividing the rich and the poor. They encourage mass consumerism and mass production, all in the name of profit. Landscapes are changed irreparably thanks to the construction of huge buildings and shopping centres, all financed by banks, all paid for with your money.

Do you care? Maybe not. Maybe you have a business that has been financed by the banks. Maybe you have seen your business increase; maybe you are making more money, employing more people. But for what? A bigger house and a bigger mortgage?

Some of you may argue that thanks to banks, the developing world is developing! But all they are going to create is more division, more fear, and more distrust; where more rural communities are split up and sent to work in the modern consumer cities. After all, it's worked so well for us here in the west! What profiteers will never understand is that development is something that goes on in the body and mind, not in concrete and glass.

Having said that, I am not against money being lent to organisations whose prime objective is to help the human race and the planet, just not financed through the traditional banking system, that's all. We need to start creating human organisations where we can put our money. Organisations that are controlled by the investors, who are asked whether they want to put their money into a project or not. I don't know about you, but I don't want my money to go into a global pot that could be used for anything, from cutting down forests, to financing armed rebellions. We need to move our money now. Today; to an organisation that is not helping to harm the environment in some faraway country they hope you'll never know about. We need those in the banking community to stand up and say they will not allow their employers to get away with the harm their strategies have on the planet. But then again, you probably all have mortgages and are afraid to lose your jobs.

If you work for a bank, and your bank funds companies or countries with human rights issues, or funds western companies who manufacture in countries with human rights issues (this includes working conditions), you are as guilty as if you were making the workers toil for eighteen hour days for a pittance. I'm sure you don't like to hear this, but it's true. You can't shut your eyes and ears and say "it's got nothing to do with me." It has.

If you work for a commercial bank you and your employer share responsibility for:

*The corporate city skyline
Globalised junk food
Slave labour in asia
The consumer society
Greed and poverty
The state of the environment*

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

If you bank with any commercial bank you are responsible too, as am I. We are all responsible, and that responsibility starts every time we put one pence into these banks. I am currently trying to find out how to run my life without banks, but until then I will be making sure that the building society I bank with does not invest in anything I disagree with! I know that's not possible, so I ask anyone who is reading this, who knows anything about banking, to please contact me and let me know how we could set up a way to use money to help people, where the money invested stays local to help local people, and to help local projects. For too long the money has gone into a central pot we have no control over; let's regain that control.

I don't want to go into company ethics here, but needless to say, if you run a company the only reason you will be taking a loan is to make more money, but for day to day banking, if you and your company care just one small percent about humanity and the planet as a whole, you will be ultra careful where you put that money.

The last borrower is none other than your friendly government. Whenever they don't have enough money in the bank to fulfil promises, they do what any self-respecting government would do; they borrow, and issue bits of paper with a promise to pay on them. The problem is, they pay interest on the debt, in some cases the government is paying millions, and in others, billions of dollars in interest payments. And who pays for that? Of course, it's you and me: the taxpayer.

What did they spend the money on? Who knows! But you can be sure they don't care about the interest payments. They don't have to individually raise the money, they just get it from us, via our direct and indirect taxes. Our money, wasted in interest payments to banks whose sole objective is to make as much money as is humanly possible without a care in the world, except for the share price; although the government is at fault for borrowing the money in the first place, which means it can't live within its means.

So there it was; banking in a nutshell. I did not set out to blame one person or organisation for all the world's problems, as we are all part of the banking system, but we must learn that our actions, although seemingly as harmless as putting in a cheque to a bank, may be causing harm to someone else or the planet on which we live. Banks and their loans can do both – quickly.

[Back to Index](#)

Belief

- 1. Any cognitive content held as true*
- 2. A vague idea in which some confidence is placed*

Let us accept god and move on. Let's us not fight over whether *he* does or does not exist. Let us accept that there is a creator and no creator. Let us accept that he could be a she, or even indeterminate. Let us accept the possibility that we have created god in our own image not the other way round. Let us accept that the universe is indivisible. Let us accept we are alive and have great work to do on this planet. Let belief come to an end, for it is futile.

Many people have asked me if I believe in god, and whether I have faith (*a strong belief in a supernatural power or powers that control human destiny*). I have often replied "Do I need to believe in god and have faith to develop compassion and insight, and live a life free of violence filled with joy and love?" "Hmmm, don't know," was generally the answer to that question, but at least it shut them up! It's not that I don't like questions on belief, it is that they seem to come from the same source as questions such as "why don't you eat meat?" in that the questioner is not looking for a serious dialogue into the subject, but merely wants to argue their case, and prove are right; because it is very important to be right, you see. Especially in the society we live in.

"How can you not belief in god, alan? Jesus christ was crucified and died for our sins. How can you not believe!" I have heard it a million times. But why is no one prepared to question this? Why is everyone so scared? Perhaps because we are the most violent species on earth, and we kill for our beliefs! The dictionary definition of belief says "a vague idea in which some confidence is placed," so why is this belief in god so strong that sometimes it makes people kill to uphold it? We should ask someone who died for it. Someone who took their own life to kill others. They are dead of course, but we can still communicate with them without the use of a medium.

Me: So what made you decide to strap the explosives to your body?
Bomber: To kill the unbelievers.
Me: Did you not think there was a better way in life, than killing innocent people?
Bomber: There was no other way. They were not innocent.
Me: In what way were they not innocent? They were women, and children, and men going about their daily business.
Bomber: But they were infidels (*a person who does not acknowledge your god*); they deserved to die.
Me: Who said? Your god or your leader?
Bomber: It was god's will.
Me: Yes, but who told you to do it? What made you believe them; that killing was right?
Bomber: I knew it was the right thing to do.
Me: But you blew yourself to bits and killed people who had families. People who had loved ones, people just like you.
Bomber: There was no other way.
Me: Do you not think god is someone who loves all beings?
Bomber: That is unimportant. What is important is that the infidels were killed.
Me: Do you regret doing it? For the suffering you caused to your family as well?
Bomber: My family is unimportant. What is important is killing anyone who is an unbeliever.
Me: I am an unbeliever would you have killed me?
Bomber: Yes.
Me: How did you feel just before you detonated the bomb?
Bomber: I felt great; like I was doing god's work.
Me: I can't listen to this any more.
Bomber: Goodbye.

So although that was a fictional conversation, we can see that belief is a powerful force. Belief is all the cells in your mind aligned in an unmovable pattern. How else can we accept that a woman who was healthy, loved by her family, and who was studying at university ended her life by suicide for the express purpose of killing as many others as she could? She was, she believed, a martyr (*one who suffers for the sake of principle*), and would be accepted into gods kingdom as some kind of hero.

But what kind of god would want to cause death and suffering? If a god was so powerful that he managed to create the earth with all its beauty; with plants, flowers, animals, lakes, rivers, and mountains; why would he be interested in someone killing on his behalf? Would a god not be horrified to see the destruction caused by killing? Let us go into this carefully.

If god, who is known as the creator, wanted that, then why would he have bothered to go to all the trouble to create so much beauty – when violence is the complete opposite? Was he at heart, a cruel god, who liked to see so much suffering carried out in his name? No. I'm afraid this is Man's work. The hand of god had no part to play in it. It is just like men to blame someone else for their wrong deeds. Men are the ones who desire power over others, who need to control and subjugate.

Killing others for belief, lies not in the realm of the gods, but firmly in the mind – the mind of men, not gods. It is convenient to blame some invisible force that everyone believes in for your work, as it adds a kind of eternal authority to the whole thing, leaving you completely blameless (in your eyes).

It is interesting to consider that this creator of all things (who looks like us of course) is actually extremely intolerant of anyone who says a bad word against him! It seems childish that one who is capable of making mountains and oceans is afraid of someone not believing in him or believing in a different god! He obviously never heard the children's rhyme "sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me!" I am asking you in all seriousness now. Why would this powerful, eternal, omnipresent being be afraid of people saying something he didn't like or not believing in him? He is the creator of all, including love and compassion; surely he shows compassion, love, and tolerance to all things?

You may think this is a stupid discussion, and the belief in your mind is urging you to put the book down in case it reads anything else it doesn't like, but I ask you to continue with me. Is the belief in your mind planted there by god or by Man? Don't think, just answer.

If it was planted in your mind by god, why was it not planted in the mind of the ones you call infidels or unbelievers? Are they worse people than you; are they not worthy of believing in your god? Does your god not like them, or was it just that they were born in a different part of the world with different traditions, and different conditioning? What is your answer?

Why do I believe? Why? Because when you were born your parents told you were a christian, a sikh, a jew, or a muslim; for no other reason. Do you follow? As you grew up you were forced to read texts which were written by prophets or disciples of god, and you followed them. You had to. You were forced to. You had to obey your teachers and your parents, or they would punish you.

You were indoctrinated into this by men. Powerful men who only had their own interests at heart. Do you see? As you got older, your brain started to believe this conditioning, after all, you had no other information to go on. So you started to believe that it was *you* who decided to believe in god. You thought there was personal choice in this, but it was already predestined for you – not by god, but by those who conditioned you.

Under the conditioning you are free – free to explore any theory that comes before you. But until you release yourself from this conditioning, you will be like the suicide bomber we had a conversation with a few moments ago. Unmovable, unshakeable from her position: brainwashed into belief.

I feel sorry, not only for those who feel they must kill on behalf of their god, but those of us who suffer as the result of belief, which is just a conditioned pattern in the brain; nothing more. I am sorry to shatter your illusions, but find out for yourself; do not believe me. I am not telling the truth, you can only find out what the truth is for yourself; through insight, not by reading books, however sacred you hold them to be.

If you feel scared, there is always one person you can believe in, and that is yourself; because it is the only authentic belief that there is. Belief in yourself as a compassionate loving human being, free from violence and turmoil in the mind, filled with joy, living in the moment. There can be nothing more beautiful than that. Belief is only the gate keeper that stops you from experiencing it. Find the key.

[Back to Index](#)

Boredom

1. *The feeling of being bored by something tedious*
2. *Boring (So lacking in interest as to cause mental weariness)*

It may be wonderful to be alive, but we all feel bored from time to time when our life lacks excitement, don't we? But why do we get this feeling, which originates in the brain, and spreads throughout our whole being? Our brains need stimulation, whether it is talking about something we are interested in, playing a game we enjoy, reading, or working in an exciting job – but life's not always like that. Sometimes there are lulls, where we are not receiving the stimulation we require; but why do we seek to fill these gaps constantly? Can we *not* sit still for a moment?

Since the day we were born, we have had parents and family stimulating our senses, always making sure we were occupied; we were never left on our own to just sit and be with ourselves.

Like most things in life, learning to enjoy your own company without anything to do is a difficult process, especially when you are learning something in adulthood. You see, the brain has become used to being occupied all the time, that when it isn't, it signals to you that it has nothing to do. So please turn on the tv, pick up a book, or go and do some exercise, just don't leave me in this neutral state!

At school I liked languages and running, but I hated physics, chemistry and mathematics. They were so boring! Why? Because I couldn't understand them; they were difficult for me to learn; and so my brain switched off and told me: "This is boring, I wish we could do something else." Now, in my late thirties (am I really that old?), I have developed a real interest in science; and although I still find it impossibly difficult, I am sticking with it.

No, boredom is not about lack of interest, it is the fear of being alone with your own feelings. If you were happy in your own mind, you wouldn't get bored.

I agree that some tasks are tedious, but the mind is such a wonderful place to escape to! You can have a holiday in the sun, and it costs you nothing, such is the power of the imagination; but we are always running to do something with our bodies. It's go, go, go, every minute of the day, right up until bedtime. Whether we're studying, working, playing, travelling, fixing, or building, our hands and our minds are occupied from the moment we wake up. It's no wonder the brain feels bored when there's nothing to do.

But learning to sit with yourself is no easy task. The first time I just sat with my own thoughts, I felt agitated; I couldn't sit still. My body was restless, and so was my mind. I still find it difficult sometimes, especially if I've had a busy day and am trying to unwind. Learning to sit with yourself is something I wish my parents had taught me as a child, when I was most receptive, and it's something I encourage all parents to teach their children to do.

So let's have a go now shall we? It doesn't have to be on the floor in the "lotus" position, just anywhere that's comfortable. I want you to sit with your legs and arms uncrossed, your palms open, preferably facing upwards, and pay attention to your breathing. Just start taking deeper breaths than normal, through your nose, slowly and deeply. That's it! Now just start to notice that your shoulders are becoming relaxed and that the good feeling is working its way down your whole body, slowly down your arms to your fingertips, down through the tops of your legs, and out through your toes, and keep breathing gently but deeply... Notice that your head is feeling heavy and relaxed.

Now imagine a scene where you felt very relaxed, it could be by a beach or it could be the smell of fresh flowers, or even the smell of the warm summer breeze on your face – whatever makes you relaxed. When you have that picture of relaxation in your mind, I want you to move it gently through your body, down from your mind, through your neck, slowly, and down your back and your arms, down your legs and down to your feet. By now you should have a nice warm feeling throughout your body. Your arms feel heavy; your legs feel heavy, but deeply relaxed. Sit for a moment and then gently come back to the room...

There, how do you feel? No different? Don't worry, it's not easy. It's doubtful you'll be able to empty your mind immediately, after all, it's used to being kept occupied at all times, but it's a start. What you should have experienced there, was just feeling more relaxed than usual, and relaxation is the key to removing boredom. Not the relaxing like watching tv or going to the pub for a drink; this is relaxation without any external stimulation. You don't need to pay anyone for this service, it comes completely free, compliments of your amazing body!

Most of us don't know what real relaxation is. We see it as a change from our usual routine. Going away for the weekend, going to the theatre, doing something adventurous, but that isn't relaxing; that's just occupying your mind with new stimulation, to relieve the tediousness of regular life. Real relaxation is nothing.

Absolutely nothing going on.

I hear some of you now crying out, “But that sounds boring! I don’t just want to close my eyes and sit to relax, I want to do something fun with my relaxation period.”

I’m sure most of you feel like this. Why do something where the end result is nothing? At least relaxing by going to the pub is fun, at least I am getting fit by playing tennis during my relaxing period; but these are activities, relaxing is not an activity, it’s a state of mind, which then influences your physical state.

We are so busy these days, that we just don’t have time to give our poor overworked brains and bodies a rest; and believe me, they need a rest. You wouldn’t drive a horse this hard, you’d be accused of cruelty! But you’re quite happy to do it to your own body. It’s as if we don’t ever want our brains to get bored, just in case something bad happens to us; but the feeling of boredom that children get especially, is just pure mental agitation, and with relaxation, will pass.

In fact, the child will be less demanding, and you won’t have to keep finding things for him to do. “Yes, but children have so much energy,” I hear you say; but even for children, the most energetic and inquisitive humans on the planet, learning to sit in quiet is highly important. After all, these will be the stressed parents of the future. Do you want your child to be as stressed as you when he grows up?

If a child learns this technique of relaxation, he will start to enjoy it as “an activity,” although it is nothing more than letting the brain and body unwind. All it takes is five to ten minutes a day, or longer if they feel happy.

Like all things, deep relaxation is a learned behaviour, and the quicker you teach your child this, the better it will be for you and for him, especially when he grows up. Imagine not having to think of the next thing to occupy your child with, in case they start screaming they want to watch a dvd, play outside, or play at the park.

Lets face it, children don’t really know what they want! They want to do a million things, and be in a million places at once, and if you don’t teach them this quiet sitting, you will find yourself going crazy trying to keep up with them.

I recommend everyone who reads this book try sitting with their own thoughts, in silence, for five minutes a day. You don’t need any special equipment or clothing, you don’t need to buy a membership, and it may give you a little insight into a wonderful person – you!

If only everyone who feels angry and agitated would try this. It is so simple, yet people seem to think that it is boring just sitting with yourself. Try to ask yourselves why your mind would tell you it was boring to give it a quick rest, to recharge its batteries. Is it hiding something it is afraid you will find out if you, and it, are left alone in the same room without anything to do? Maybe you will have to find out!

Sit a while, and watch your thoughts
Breathe deeply and evenly
Imagine a scene of total tranquillity
Let that image float over your body
and relax...

[Back to Index](#)

Brain

1. *That part of the central nervous system that includes all the higher nervous centres; enclosed within the skull; continuous with the spinal cord*
2. *That which is responsible for one's thoughts and feelings; the seat of the faculty of reason*

Let's be silly and imagine for a moment that someone from another planet came to visit...

Shop assistant: Ah, so you're interested in a brain, are you? This is our top of the range model. It is the "homo sapiens model 2000," the ferrari of brains.

Alien visitor: Cool, looks great, What version is the software that it comes with?

Shop assistant: Version 1.0.

Alien visitor: Oh, I see. Thanks, but I think I'll wait for the next version.

The brain. The lump of grey stuff that is responsible for me being able to type, drink tea, go to the toilet, make love, walk, and run. It's an amazing bit of hardware, and we, the homo sapiens species are lucky to have acquired it. No other species in the known universe has a brain as complex as ours. We are definitely top dog when it comes to brains. Somehow, millions of connections are made and we see the world, interact with it, perform routine functions, and most of all, (and this is the best part) our brain gives us the ability to store huge amounts of data, retrieve it at will, and process it accordingly.

Psychiatrists, doctors, and philosophers have long tried to understand the brain, and unfortunately, we have divided it into two parts – the brain and the mind. The brain being the engine, and the mind the driver. But for the purposes of our discussion we will say that the brain and the mind are the same. After all, wherever the thoughts and feelings originate from, and whatever else is going on up there, it is all enclosed in the skull that is attached to our neck!

The ability to think (and think and think)

I don't know about you, but I love thinking about things; but this ability hasn't been with us for that long, if we believe we evolved from the apes. Somehow after coming down from the trees, in what we now call africa, we developed a special ability .

Some say it is through switching from a nuts and berries diet to a high protein meat diet, but I have a problem with that theory, as surely that would mean that any animal, who through necessity, switches to eating meat could develop this ability! Lions eat lots of meat already, and all they seem to do is lie around in the sun, roaring occasionally. Others say it is impossible we evolved from the apes, and that we couldn't have developed these abilities, so we must have been created as we are, thinking brains intact. And until people gain more insight they probably will be arguing about this for many millennia to come.

But our brain does seem to have evolved, doesn't it? Firm evidence for this is shown in the time it took us to discover fire, invent the wheel, develop agriculture, make tools, learn engineering skills, and finally build skyscrapers and nuclear bombs. There is no denying that this must have been a process, otherwise the cavemen wouldn't have been cavemen; they would have been sitting around playing computer games, drinking beer, and listening to cd's. What do you think?

For about a million years, there seems to have been little progress, and then suddenly things start happening. Man's brain starts making the connections, and the engine starts. After that there has been no stopping us!

Unfortunately, it didn't happen like that at all. Basic agriculture was invented only about 12,000 years ago, and up until recently – more specifically the dawn of the industrial revolution (*the transformation from an agricultural to an industrial world*), about 200 years ago – people were living simply with no tv, no satellite navigation, no cars, no electricity, and no junk food. In fact, many people over the world still live like this, so let's not get carried away with ourselves, thinking we are so great, and our brains are so amazing. We must also remember that for the last X thousand years we have been brutally killing each other in our quest for power and domination. Some brain, eh?

Do you want chips with that?

In fact, the fast moving consumer world we live in has only been around for the last forty years or so, and only really picked up pace in the eighties with the dawn of personal computing, when they finally got the silicon chips (invented several years before) down to a manageable size, and price, people could afford.

So, it is the invention of the microprocessor chip that is really fuelling the fast pace of the world. Without it, we would be living a much different life. And if you don't believe me, think about what applications the microprocessor can be used in; almost everything. So let's remember that this is a new invention, almost as important as the discovery of the wheel; and thanks to the rapid development time of new software, we are bringing out more and more applications.

Aircraft, cars, military equipment, medical equipment, stock broking systems, ordering systems, delivery

systems, media systems, and electricity distribution networks amongst others – they all have chips in them; and are all controlled by software, running thousands of lines of code a second. So, if you want to imagine a world without the microchip you better think back to how it was living fifty years ago, not a million years ago.

Computers help humans do tasks they couldn't easily do (like fly fighter jets for example). Imagine trying to make all the adjustments necessary to the ailerons, the rudder, the flight path, the pitch and the yaw. Of course, we *could* do it in an emergency, but our minds would be so tied up with all the calculations necessary, we would be constantly on the go! Computers let us take the big picture view, so we punch in the co-ordinates and all the data needed to run the jet, and then let the computer take care of the dirty work, while we concentrate on more important things!

Software (*written programs or procedures or rules and associated documentation pertaining to the operation of a computer system and that are stored in read/write memory*) runs the show these days, and it certainly makes running such a fast moving and complex world manageable. No longer do we have to worry about all the detail. As long as the software is programmed correctly, and we feed in the correct data, we can sit back a bit and enjoy the ride.

Take for example, your humble cruise missile (*an unmanned aircraft that is a self-contained bomb*). It has a guidance system in the nose, and uses the global positioning network to hit a door many miles away. It's hands-off war. You design the microchip and software, and then all the operator has to do is tell it where to go. And go it does. It has no brain to speak of; it cannot reason, cannot change its mind, has no empathy, no compassion, no love, nor does it have ethics or morals; it just follows the instructions given to it by the human brain.

More and more, we rely on software to run our daily lives. It is the extension of our brain, doing tasks we either cannot do, or do not want to do ourselves. Just imagine how your life would run if it wasn't aided by computers. Do it now. Imagine there are no computers in the world. Imagine what life would be like. Can you? Is it impossible to think of a time when we had no software control? Of course not. We got on fine without computers in the past, but we are building a society that relies on them; and *that* puts the hardware and the software companies in a very powerful position over us, don't you think?

Some people have suggested that with the dawning of artificial intelligence, computers could one day run the world; but without us, they don't exist, and cannot exist. Even people who predict that the machines will take over the world by "learning" how to make copies of themselves seem to forget that humans need to program them in the first place, and that programming skill comes out of the human mind – a mind so complex we don't really understand the first thing about it. We are just the "users" of the software, not the programmers, so instead of concentrating on building a new brain (the computer) we understand, maybe we should try to understand our own brain first.

Who is the programmer?

Given the short space of time we have been starting to explore the world with our minds, I think it would be fair to say that we are on version 1.0 of the brain's software. So we shouldn't be surprised that we still murder each other, desire power and wealth, and spend most of our time in conflict with ourselves and each other. Let's not feel too bad, we're doing the best we can, given our limited insight and lack of an instruction manual!

And that's just it, isn't it? We don't have a "users guide" to the brain we can refer to, and make upgrades where necessary. It's like being given the most complex piece of hardware and software available in the world, and someone saying "Get on with it." Or someone (like our parents, teachers, leaders etc.) saying "Yes I think this is how you use it," without them having a clue either.

As you can imagine, it all starts getting pretty chaotic. And it's not just one person; everyone wants to have a go at telling you how to use it! "No, do it this way," "no do it that way," "why don't you try this?" "this is the solution!" It all seems a little bit ridiculous now, thinking about it!

Imagine sitting in a factory at the mainframe with no idea what a mainframe is, and everyone telling you you've got to use it; except there is no instruction manual. Now all the other workers come in, and give you advice on how to use it. Would you understand how to operate it, or would you just be even more confused

than before you sat down? Think about it for a moment. You have the hardware. You have the software. No manual. And a thousand opinions. What's going to happen? You've got it! Confusion.

I don't remember anything from when I was a baby, but I'm sure I made a lot of gurgling noises, wet myself often and made some nasty smells. My brain wasn't even at version 1.0, it was probably in pre-beta testing (*preliminary or testing stage of a software or hardware product*). Slowly, but surely, it was given more instructions on how to operate, by someone who had gone through this exact same process themselves (still no manual). Over the years more and more software was added to the hardware to allow it to know what talking, going to the toilet, or having manners is, and finally at the age of eighteen, it is released into the world at Version 1.0.

But where did the initial instructions come from, if we know that there is no manual? Surely, we must be able to go back to the beginning, where the first words were uttered, and find the manual; but there isn't one, there never has been one.

Perhaps that is why so many people follow religions. Perhaps books like the koran and the bible are the user guide, and like so many software companies, god forgot to enclose the manual when he shipped the first product, and everyone had to wait thousands of years for it to arrive! Who knows?

I think it is fair to say that there was never a users guide to the brain. Everyone just did the best they could, and muddled through life trying to make sense of everything, get enough to eat, have somewhere to live, and find a partner with whom to make a new member of the species. It seems that nothing has really changed since our brains became developed enough to be able to process such complex information.

Unlike the old mainframes, which have been replaced by new hardware and new software, we are still running the old trusty version 1.0 hardware and software. We can't blame people if they don't live a perfect life and make mistakes. That's just how it is.

This one's faulty I want to exchange it

"We're not happy with this version," say some of you. "We want something better, we want an upgrade" and perhaps that's what people think they are getting when they start following god's user guide. But that cannot be the original, if we believe we have been on this planet in some shape or form for millions of years. After all, people who read these guides are still trapped by greed, power and desire. "Ah," say you, "that's because they haven't been following the instructions," and maybe that's true.

But let's move away from religion for a moment and have a look at this operating system ourselves. We know we can't go to the shop and get a new one, so we'll just have to "fix" what we've been given. By fix, I don't mean just add more software; we need to go deep inside the mainframe and examine the code, line by line, to see where the fault lies; and from what I see around me in the world, there definitely is a fault.

In a way, when I have been writing, and you have been reading all the topics in this book, that's what you and I have been doing. We have been examining the code like diligent programmers, and making adjustments where necessary so we don't have any more faulty instructions like:

- 1) Want even more territory than have already
- 2) Decide how to get it (run subroutine)
 - a) take by force or buy
 - (i) If buy then end
 - (ii) If take by force then goto line 3
- 3) Assemble army
- 4) Kill everyone to get it
- 5) End program

Please excuse my coding skills, but hopefully you get the point! You see, there is a core operating system which is running all the tricky processes, like breathing, and pumping blood around the system, but the rest is up to "us," the people who attempt to control the software by trying anything out to see how it works. If it

does work, the software then runs by itself every day without us even being aware of it running; do you understand?

I see that when I get angry, people are scared of me, and they will do what I want them to do, so the software program is then put into the ram (*random access memory*) and is used on a daily basis. It is only when an engineer (who is us also) notices that this program isn't functioning correctly, that the code can either be deleted or fixed.

Some of the more technical amongst you would argue that the program is running perfectly well, as it has no errors in it, and what I am talking about is purely philosophical. Maybe I would agree, because you see, if the brain, or the mind, is the seat of everything we are, and we are part of the whole, the indivisible, then the label I see on the software box is "Brain: Operating system keeps species alive. Added bonus: Also contains the whole suite of compassion and love programs built into the operating system." But maybe we should get back to our main discussion!

For a moment, let's imagine that love and compassion *are* already built in. "But then, if that is so," says you, "why do we still cause ourselves and each other such misery? Surely if you are saying that love and compassion are part of the operating system then they should influence all the other programs behaviour?"

Unfortunately, as with all operating systems, there can be glitches, and the software we install can also affect the operating system adversely, or contain trojans (*a program that appears desirable but actually contains something harmful*), or viruses (*a software program capable of reproducing itself and usually capable of causing great harm to files or other programs on the same computer*), and we have to remember that even though the universe is the whole, and we are part of the whole, there is no such thing as perfection; that is merely a human idea (*a perfect embodiment of a concept*). Everything has flaws, that's why we are looking through the code!

Oh my god! I've got a trojan in my brain!

If we look at desire (*the feeling that accompanies an unsatisfied state, An inclination to want things*), it all looks good on the surface. I desire a new car to make me happy, so I buy it, take it home, and feel happier. Only very soon, I start to desire more things, as I am now unsatisfied again. If I had never run the program "desire," then all would have been fine, but I did, and I now have to pay the price for running it. I am now constantly in an unsatisfied state, and as with other unwanted programs, we have to find a way to (a) find them and (b) delete them. Once we have deleted the program "desire" we won't have the same problems with the operating system; but if you load it again, you will be back to square one.

Unfortunately, some of these programs cleverly hide themselves, and have code to self-launch again. So by initiating the "awareness" program, which is like a sentry to guard against unwanted intruders, we stop it from launching.

If awareness is like an anti-trojan program, then compassion and love must be the anti-virus programs. Some virus programs, like "hate," for example, can be destructive to the whole operating system, and can affect other computers as well. These programs are so deadly, that once found must be cleaned immediately, otherwise they cause the entire system to break down – and we don't want that, do we? So far so good! I hope my computer analogies aren't too boring for the less technical out there, but hopefully you understand what I am trying to convey to you.

I am the programmer

I don't want to get into a discussion about who "I" really is here, that is for another topic; so for now we will just have to agree that "I" is the person who is in charge of the brain (or is the brain in charge of itself?), and we have to remember that "I" decide to pick up a cup, "I" decide to cheat on my wife," "I" decide to hate someone because of their colour.

The person who is physically in control of the muscles in the body, also has the ability to program the brain, but we all must remember, that everyone else knows you don't have an instruction manual, so they will try to help you program your brain. You must not let that happen. What do they know? They didn't have

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

an instruction manual either, so how can you know that the code they are giving you is correct?

I do not want you to believe me when I tell you that love and compassion, *are* built in programs, I want you to test it out for yourselves, by allowing the awareness, love, and compassion programs to run! Soon you will find that the bad code, the trojans, the viruses, and any other faulty instructions that have been fed into your brain will start to be deleted one by one. I have tested it for myself, and boy did I have some dodgy programs lying around; and some seriously nasty trojans! But I have to say, my operating system seems to be running smoothly now.

It is time for an upgrade. Upgrade yourself to version 2.0. What? You didn't just think you could jump to version 9.0, did you? After all, life is a process. What about all those bug fixes you have to do along the way?

A human brain version 2.0 – I want one!

No, I don't need a manual, I'm going to write my own.

[Back to Index](#)

Bullying

1. *The act of intimidating a weaker person to make them do something*
2. *Discourage or frighten with threats or a domineering manner; intimidate*

We've all known one, I'm sure, but have you ever been one? Are you one now, and would you recognise if you were one? Such difficult questions, right at the beginning of the discussion! So how do you spot a bully? You may instantly recognise him from school. The stereotypical large framed older male, usually not very bright, he uses his size to push weaker, smaller people around, generally intimidating everyone who crosses his path. Never charming, always aggressive. Sound familiar? But as he gets older other people get bigger too, and he may lose his size advantage. Usually he is distinctly lacking in social skills. That was easy, wasn't it!

So how do you spot the next bully, the office bully, who bullies his work colleagues or subordinates? Or the next bully, the charmer, who bullies his wife when he gets home? Unfortunately these characters are everywhere; who knows, you may even be one.

So what causes people to want to intimidate others? Namely, because they can. A bully will never pick on someone larger than him, that would defeat the object of being a bully, and he may get a nasty surprise. He will always pick on someone physically weaker, like a female or a smaller male than himself, or at work, someone in an inferior position. The bully also targets emotionally weaker individuals like females (although not exclusively, and remember there are female bullies). They will use hurtful language and physical threats, which may become real at some point. Your average bully is a thoroughly unpleasant individual.

If that's you, have a good think about the way I described you. How do you *feel*? You may have been bullied as a child, and maybe you are trying to get your own back on the people that bullied you.

Bullying makes life hell for those on the receiving end, especially if the perpetrator is a close family member you love. How many women suffer at the hands of a man who pretends he loves them, but takes out his frustration on them when he gets home? You, the man; you, the bully, who is so weak inside, you have to hurt others with your vicious words and your hands that leave a mark for all to see.

"Why do women stay with men like that?" people ask. "Why doesn't she just leave him?" "Why doesn't she go to the police?" Of course, bullied women have thought about the same things countless times, but to a wife, who may also be a mother, there are a whole range of issues to think about. She isn't just thinking about herself, and that is the saddest part of all. "Where would I go? Would people think badly of me for leaving my husband? Would people judge me and think it was all my fault; that somehow I had driven him to it?"

At this point we need to STOP. The only person to blame is the bully – whatever the reason (Sorry I'm under a lot of pressure, it won't happen again etc). The bully is to blame. He must seek to develop awareness of himself in action, if the relationship is to continue. The same goes for the office bully, and the school bully. For the victims it is mental torture, being afraid in case they say, or do something to you.

Unfortunately, once you start with the "please don't," or "please stop," they seem to take that as a signal to go ahead and intimidate you more. The more you show weakness, the stronger they become. They feed on your fear. Be still, be silent. See through the fear that is draining you of all of your energy and stand tall.

Never engage a bully verbally. Use the power of silence against him

This may sound like an impossible task for you who has been the victim for so long. Use their power and anger against them, it is the only way. Reflect it back, not by using any magical force field, but by standing calmly. Breathe deeply through the nose. One, breathe in – taking in strength. Two, breathe out – releasing fear. Always remember the power of the breath to still the mind and calm the body (yogis have been doing this for thousands of years). Feel the power to look into his eyes even if he raises his fist against you. "You cannot hurt me." Not a stare of defiance but one of inner strength.

The second step forward is to offer him your compassion. Ultimately, the man who hurts others, is the one who needs our help. We don't feel sorry for him, we feel compassion (*the humane quality of understanding the suffering of others and wanting to do something about it*). I know this sounds crazy to you, because you are thinking "Wait, I am the one who is suffering;" But without wanting to help them, they will continue to hurt you.

The third step is the most difficult of all. But to leave whatever situation you are in is the only way

forward for you, and for them. There is no time for talking about reconciliation; bullying is torture and you wouldn't stay with a torturer until he worked out his problems, would you?

If anyone asks you why you are leaving, you must tell them it is because you are being bullied. You must regain your inner strength. I guarantee that as soon as you leave the situation, you will feel better. If it is a loved one you are leaving, remind yourself why. Do not listen to their cries of "Please stay, I'll change I really love you..." You have done more than enough for them. You must be strong and silent. They need to become aware of themselves and their actions, but not whilst you are still there, as they would be liable to carry on where they left off. The key to disarming a bully, however strong he is physically, is to treat him with silence. The more silent you are, the stronger you become; language is his weapon, let silence be yours.

It is time to talk to the bully inside...

So who are you really? You who intimidates others. Are you powerful? Do you feel strong when you make people feel afraid, does it make you more of a man? Will people show you more respect? In a strange way, you are just like a criminal who intimidates weaker people to get what he wants; using threats of physical violence, and using threatening words. You are no better than a common criminal, and you should be treated as such – no mitigating factors allowed.

Whether you are still at school, in the workplace, or in the home, you deserve no respect from anyone. You have earned nothing but their contempt. You should be denied all access to those you intimidate, much like a criminal is segregated from the public. Just answer me one thing: "Do you really feel you have earned the right to hurt people?" Who gave you that right? Your father? Did he bully people too? Are you just imitating him, or are you really that weak that you have to hurt others? Soon we will find out. You probably don't want to stop; you probably wouldn't know where to stop, but I know when to stop, and that is *Right Now*.

Right now, you are aware you are a bully, that you hurt people, even when you try not to. Somehow something deep inside makes you want to hurt people. But it is *you* that is hurting inside, isn't it? No one will listen to your pain, and you have to let people know, don't you? You want them to feel what you are feeling, don't you? But that's not the way to do it. You need to become aware of what you are feeling right now. You need to tell yourself: "I can heal. I want to heal. I want to be whole. I want to feel love. I do not want to hurt any more." And in this moment, you are love. You have opened yourself up to the world; you have unlocked the prison of your mind, and let love in.

You can heal, but first you have to do something very brave. You have to face your victims – maybe not in reality at first, but visualise them in your mind. Now apologise to them. Do not ask for their forgiveness; ask for their compassion instead. You may not be able to do this on your own, so please get someone to help you, whether it be a doctor or a therapist. You need help.

You can help yourself, but the most important thing is to heal the violence and anger that is raging through your body, and to build up your own self-esteem, so you can start to deal with people, without needing to control or dominate them. Everyone is on this earth together, and everyone deserves to be left to carry on his or her life without fear of intimidation from others.

**

Bullying is real, and of course, you can report it to the police. You may choose to take the person to court, where they may be convicted, and they may go to jail, or receive a fine, but like all violent people who are merely locked up, they will not be healed when they come out into society again. As compassionate human beings, do we not need to recognise that people need help, and offer it to them in order to protect others in the future? This may be hard for you to decide, so I ask you to think about it carefully in case this situation ever arises, or you are in the middle of this situation right now.

The bullying of partners (especially females) is more rightly called domestic violence (*violence in the home*), and often, when the police are eventually called, the man has convinced the partner to say nothing was happening (under more threats of course), and will play the part of the lying charmer to the police, who will probably do nothing. You will be back where you started. Violence is sickening to most of us in the world. It is not a part of being human. You do not have to put up with it.

Up to now we have been really talking about two adults, whether in a work situation, or at home, where

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

the victim could walk out at any time. When you're a child you can't. Even if you have a little bit of money, where would you go? The world is a scary place. Who would believe you? If you went to the police wouldn't they just take you back home? Your father or mother, who were abusing you would make up some lies and you would be released back into their "care." It is an almost impossible situation as a child or adolescent.

So what do you do? You just lie back and take it, vowing to (a) take revenge on your parents when you get older and (b) take out your hurt and anger on someone weaker than you – maybe even your own child.

It is an unfortunate fact, that children of abusers often become the very person they despised. There are charities that are starting to help children of abuse, but these are few and far between, and it is hard for children to open up to strangers, especially about things like this. I feel so, so sorry for them. I wish I could do more. I just hope that people get to the children before it's too late, before they have suffered so much, that they themselves become violence. Brought into the world, laughing, and smiling, only to be beaten, tortured and mentally abused. I just have one question for the parents: How can you?

*How can you do it to your own child?
The one you created. The tiny helpless child...
Did you bring him into the world to abuse? To hurt?
I give you my compassion today, but only because I want to help the child.
Transcend violence. Seek help.
Find compassion and love which are the only way.
Do it now.
Do not make people suffer any longer.*

[Back to Index](#)

C

Celebrity

- 1. A widely known person*
- 2. The state or quality of being widely honoured and acclaimed*

Celebrities are everywhere. You can't get away from their bleached smiles and suntans, can you? They roam the globe, appearing on everything from gossip magazines to chat shows. Standing up for women's rights, being patrons of cat charities, aids charities, victims of crime charities. Everywhere you look they are there – smiling out at you.

Sometimes they are photographed drunk, or maybe you might see a police mugshot of them, where they have been arrested for lewd behaviour, fighting, or up on some drugs charge. Poor things. They have a terrible life. All that money and fame, and still they are unhappy. They complain that the press are invading their privacy, but that's how they got famous in the first place, by smiling for the tv cameras, magazines etc.

They are usually attractive, dress in expensive clothes, eat at fancy restaurants; and if they have earned enough, usually buy some sprawling property to affirm their A-list status. They smile and they smile, but how did they get to be so famous?

Some are actors and actresses, others are singers, the rest are models, reality tv stars, tv soap opera stars, or sportsman. Teenagers pin up posters of them all over their walls; they get the stars to sign autographs (err their names), and young boys and girls alike drool over the latest celebrity to hit our screens, and gossip about them at school.

"Oh, she's so sexy..."

"No she isn't. She's ugly."

"What? What do you know?"

"Hey, but I'll tell you who is gorgeous though..."

It goes on and on. The celebrities get richer, the fans grow more adoring, and the smile just keeps getting whiter and whiter!

Dad, meet my new role model, he's a gangsta rapper!

Parents are always thought of as role models for children, well, that's how it used to be before the advent of the movie screen, the record, and the tv. Before this, it used to be a closed house. Mum and dad made the rules, and brought up their children to behave like them.

One day it all changed; the beautiful movie star appeared on screen. Suddenly mum wasn't someone to look up to any more, she was boring and strict, this star was beautiful, got all the men, and she smoked! Mum definitely wouldn't approve! "Good," thought the teenagers, "these are the people I want to look up to. They are glamorous, rich, and exciting, not like boring mum or dad."

Boys later saw "rebellious" rock stars playing their raunchy guitars, surrounded by beautiful women, and they wanted to be like them. Dad worked in an office, came home at five, had his dinner, and went to bed. "Great! I don't want a dad like that," they thought. "I don't want to be like him when I grow up; I want to be a gangster, or a rocker, or an actor! I want to have an exciting life. If they can do it so will I."

Today, celebrity role models go from strength to strength; and from all accounts, the badder they are, the better! Parents are horrified that their children idolise people like african-american rappers who have been, or still are, affiliated with dangerous drug gangs, up on drugs or gun charges, and call their women derogatory names like "bitch" and "ho" (whore), but the fans just lap it up.

They love to buy into this magical world; that they can, for a small fee (cd, or movie ticket), be a part of, if only for a short time. They dress like them, start to use street slang in everyday life, and are genuinely surprised when they find out that mum and dad don't like it! Actually they aren't surprised, because they want mum and dad to be shocked. They want them to say "turn off that music," "you're not going out dressed like that," "I forbid you to watch that movie." To the teenagers, it's all a great game, isn't it? And for the celebrity, however minor, it's like all their ships came in at once: Payday.

So the celebrities go out and spend their money; that's what the people want after all. Teenagers don't want to be idolising some rocker who doesn't swear, doesn't drink much, doesn't do drugs, and doesn't have sex with "bitches." They would be horrified to find him in a modest home, taking public transport to work, caring about his wife and four beautiful children, and going out for walks with his poodle dog called "fluffy." They can get all that at home.

Idolising a celebrity, is about them doing all the things you (a) wish you had the money to do, and (b) had the balls to do. So when we see a tv star on the front cover of the national tabloid magazine snorting coke, what do we do? The older generation say “isn’t that appalling?” And the younger generation say “Yeah! way to go!” and then discuss how cool it was that so and so was caught on camera with a spoon up his nose, and two hookers in his bed.

Celebrities get to do the things we want to do, but (a) we can’t afford any coke, and (b) we don’t know any hookers, and (c) it’s not so interesting if you’re not a celebrity.

And that’s the difference between us and celebrities. If we were to go to nightclubs every night, do a gram of coke every day, and have three in a bed romps with hookers, people would be trying to get us psychiatric help, or they would pour scorn on us and say “look at the mess he’s made of his life, after all his opportunities...” Oh, and we would probably get fired from our job, and then we may end up in court! But for a celebrity these acts are, if not applauded by the general public, tolerated as being part of a celebrity lifestyle.

When the flame goes out

The problem is, celebrities are, funnily enough, just regular people like you and me. They have the same fears, the same personal troubles, except they are thrown into the limelight.

At first it’s great. Imagine a hundred cameras taking a picture of your smiling face! Imagine being on stage in front of sixty thousand people, or having millions of people watch you at the cinema twenty foot tall, the feelings it must stir would be incredible! “All this attention for me?” Your brain would say. “Wow! This is fantastic.” And I’m sure it is.

A few years ago I would have loved to have been a celebrity. In fact I always wanted to be an actor or a star of some kind. Maybe I was lacking something as a child, but when I failed to live up to myself (never went to stage school, was very average at music), I gave up. I am sure this is a similar story for many people, and judging by how many people turn up for the auditions to be on reality search for a star programmes on tv, there is no shortage of wannabes!

Whilst some musicians or actors may take offence to being described as drug taking lunatics having sex with “ho’s” every night, I may add that this is not an essay about the film or music industry, but an investigation of what it means to be a celebrity; and if you don’t do coke every night and “bang bitches,” then good for you!

So you are now a celebrity (unlike me) and you have all the attention. People “love you” (the image you portray) and they buy your records, or watch you on tv, or see you at the movies. You have been paid a lot of money and you’ve bought a lot of stuff. You have celebrity friends, you go to celebrity parties, everything is about you. You are the star. People are nice to you in the street. You get the best table in the restaurant. You holiday in the most expensive resorts in the caribbean. Your picture is everywhere. Then one day...

The last film or record you did was a flop; there’s someone new on the block, someone with an even whiter smile than you; your agent stops calling you, no one is interested in you any more, you were yesterday’s idol, and they are tired of looking at the same face and body. They want a new pin-up, someone more exciting, someone who can give them more of what they want. They want raunchier, dirtier, sexier, cleaner – someone who knows what they want. All you know is they don’t want you any more.

How do you feel? How does it make you feel that nobody invites you to parties any more, that no one wants your autograph in the street, that no one cares anything about you, apart from maybe to say “Oh, isn’t that so and so? She used to be someone famous, but she’s all washed up now. Look at the way she dresses, and her make-up is terrible. I can’t believe I used to have a poster of her on my wall.”

So what thoughts go through your head when this happens to you, which it will, because celebrity doesn’t last for ever, unless you are one of ten old wrinkled stars the public has taken to. But for the rest of you, it’s the celebrity scrapheap. If you’re a football star, tv soap star, or reality tv star I have the unfortunate task of being the bearer of bad news. Your star is about to go out even quicker than movie stars or rock stars.

I am not to blame! They made me get up in front of the camera

Some ex-stars inevitably feel bitter about the whole process of being summarily dumped first by their record label, or movie studio, and then next, the general public. They may blame everyone for having taken advantage of them when they were vulnerable, that in fact they hated standing up in front of all the press cameras all the time and signing autograph after autograph. But if there is blame to be apportioned then it would have to be with their brain, which, after all, sought the fame in the first place, and then subsequently couldn't deal with rejection. Adulation then rejection.

It must be a very hard fall, but for the people in charge of the media, it's just business. They are happy to make you a celebrity, and keeping pandering to your ego, as long as you keep bringing in the money for them. Some celebrities (rightly) cannot believe they have been treated like a piece of meat, but that's all you are as a celebrity; a piece of meat to be tossed around with for profit – albeit a human piece of meat.

So why do it in the first place? Lack of love as a child? Low self-esteem? Perhaps. But the mind is tricky, and we have to watch it closely. You see, being a star of any kind means putting on a mask. The mask of deception. You are pretending to be someone in order to get the audience to believe you, and if you are good, you deceive them thoroughly (whether as an actor or rock star), but it isn't the real you.

The public love the character, but would they love you without the mask? The media companies cannot afford to take that chance, and you are forced out in character whenever you are in public. Pretty soon, the mind, being easily fooled, starts to believe that you really are that character, and plays along nicely. It is only when someone tells you no one is interested in seeing your character any more, that things turn nasty.

The mind rightly questions why it is not allowed to play the character any more, that it, in fact liked the character, and liked being applauded, and cheered, and photographed, and actually liked going to celebrity parties, and actually, whilst you weren't looking, quietly disposed of the authentic you, in the mind garbage bin. So you see, it couldn't possibly go back to just being ordinary any more; it was great; people loved it, people loved the part it was playing.

But as the realisation sinks in that you are no longer the character, so does the realisation that you don't know who you are any more. You have been so used to playing a part that you forget how to be you without the pretence.

Unmasking the actor

So how does someone who has kept up a pretence find the real person again? Is it difficult or impossible to find this person? Do they exist any more? That's what we shall find out.

Acting a part in life is something we all do to some extent. We pretend we are someone we wish we were. We pretend we are more confident than we really are, or more intelligent because we really don't want people to see who we are. Our minds, being the protective guardians of our self-esteem, don't want to let people see that we are not intelligent or confident. We want to project an image for others to see, of somebody they will like. Do you understand? It is a brave person who faces the world without his mask on. We are all actors; some people just get paid for it!

We can keep up an act for years, sometimes for our whole life, but what happens when we are unmasked, when no one wants to see our act any more? What happens then? Well, I'll tell you; a great deal of mental anguish! I kept up the pretence of a cool, funny, confident, successful professional for years, but none of it was true; and when the mask did come off it was a scary experience. I found myself empty, alone, and anxious. I was a stranger in my own body. Who was I? How could I find out? I sat in pain for several years, unable to live with myself without projecting a confident exterior.

One day, I spoke to an old friend, and they asked how I was, probably expecting a resounding "great, fantastic, never better," but I replied, "very unhappy," which threw him a bit.

"Ahh, you'll get over it al," they said, "you are really confident funny guy."

"That's the thing," I said, "actually, I'm not. I've been suffering from anxiety and panic attacks for the last..."

"Is that so...?" they added uncomfortably, "well, al, it's been nice seeing you again, take care, ok?"

And with that, they disappeared, and I haven't seen or heard from them since.

You see, the person they liked was the image they had of me. They believed I was confident and

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

successful, so I must be. When I revealed that it was all an act (albeit a mildly subconscious act) they felt let down, as if I'd cheated them somehow. That I had not been honest with them, and maybe they then questioned if I had managed to fool him, how many others were doing the same. And what if he was just wearing a mask?

Who knows the answers to these questions; all I know is that it is better to live an authentic life without the mask, that is, not pretending to be someone just so others will like you. But it is an easy trap to fall into. That is the trap of celebrity, which is just a bigger brighter, more expensive, ultra white toothed mask than you and I wear.

We must learn to be authentic. From authenticity there is nowhere to fall psychologically. Do you understand? When we live authentically in complete awareness of ourselves in relationship with others we have no need to pretend. If people do not like us for who we are, so be it. No pretending. No mask. You are open to the universe. What a scary, and at the same time wonderful feeling to have. Embrace it.

[Back to Index](#)

Change

1. *An event that occurs when something passes from one state or phase to another*
2. *A relational difference between states; especially between states before and after some event*
 3. *The action of changing something*
 4. *The result of alteration or modification*
 5. *A thing that is different*
 6. *A difference that is usually pleasant*

We all want to change, don't we? We're not happy with the way we look, we want to stop smoking, we want to be nicer to people, and we don't want to be so selfish to people. We want to change because we are unhappy with the way we are.

I never wanted to change, I was happy the way I was; maybe a flatter stomach and bigger muscles would be nice, but that's about all; and I couldn't really be bothered to go to the gym. Well, saying that, I paid for many a gym subscription, but all in all, I just couldn't be bothered. If it happened instantaneously, without any real commitment on my part, that would be fine, otherwise, if it happened, it happened. So invariably, my gym membership lapsed, and here I am again with the same "not quite flat" stomach.

This has been going on for many years, and I doubt will ever change. Why? Because deep down I'm really not that bothered about my stomach. It would be nice to look like a highly toned athlete, but it never ruined my chances with women, and nobody liked me any less, so it wasn't high on my priority list. That's the thing with change, we want it to happen straight away or we lose interest. We think we "should" change; people tell us we "should" change; but unless we really want to change, it will never happen.

Should

1. *Expresses an emotional, practical, or other reason for doing something*

"I drink too much. I *should* stop drinking."
"I eat too much junk food, I *should* eat more healthily."
"I get angry all the time, I *should* try to calm down."
"I *should* phone my mother more often."
"I *should* do my homework before watching tv."
"I *should* be more careful with my money."
"I *should* help out around the house more."
"I *should* pay my bills on time."

Should. Probably one of the worst words in the dictionary. A word that defines what we think is expected of us, not what we really want to do. Although, want (*a specific feeling of desire*) is a similar word.

"I *want* to lose weight."
"I *want* to be nicer to my mother."
"I *want* to stop drinking."
"I *want* to be calmer."
"I *want* to pay my bills on time."

but...

There's always a "but" when we use the word *want*.

"I want to go for a run today, *but* it's a bit cold."
"I want to lose weight, *but* it's so hard because I'm so busy at work"
"I want to phone my mother more often, *but* I never get the time."
"I want to help about around the house more *but* I'm always so tired when I get home."
"I want to calm down, *but* everything makes me angry."

So we've got a good selection of words here, haven't we? Should, want and but.

"I *should* lose weight. I *want* to lose weight, *but* I just can't" or to put it another way, it's what we *ought* to do, and what we *would* do if it wasn't difficult, and finally the excuse for not doing it!

It's just all too difficult, isn't it? So what do we do? We buy self-help books from self-styled lifestyle

gurus, personal growth coaches, diet experts, or psychologists trying to help you heal your “inner child.” We buy exercise dvd’s and audio books for relaxation and meditation; we attend yoga and tai-chi classes. We study spiritualism, turn to religion, have our chakras balanced; and we believe it when someone says in a book they will change our life in 7 days.

When the first one doesn’t work, we try another. When the second one doesn’t work we try a third. When the third one doesn’t work, we try a fourth. We become addicted to finding the solution. After all, if the diet guru has helped one million people to lose weight, or the addiction specialist has helped thousands back to sobriety, surely they must be able to help you?

What about the hypnotherapist who has helped thousands of people to give up smoking, surely he must be able to help you? Or the religious guru, who has helped millions to find god and find peace in their lives? Surely someone must be able to help you? The more you try and fail, the more despondent you become. You begin to think that no one can help you, and if these gurus have managed to help all these people, there must be something fundamentally wrong with you. So what do you do? You give up trying and tell everybody “I’ve tried everything, but nothing works.”

How many people write books on change? There are thousands of books on the shelves at your local bookstore. They are not all bad; some offer great advice and insight. “Stop smoking TODAY!” “Change bad habits and turn them into profit!” “Don’t sell yourself short!” “Become more effective today!” “Stop procrastinating!” “Live life today, don’t wait for tomorrow!” “Become rich without trying!” There are so many of these books now – change has become a billion-dollar industry.

These aren’t bad people. They all have their own tips on life; they all want to help you change; they’re not tricking you, they’re just doing what everybody does; making a bit of money and offering you one word: Hope. They are showing you that it is possible to change, but before you all run down to your local bookstores, and spend your hard earned money on these glossy paperbacks, let me ask you one question: Why do you think they are so popular? Think about that for a moment.

Have you ever seen a self-help book, or programme that takes ten years to complete; or one that tells you that the chances of failure are high? It’s all about now! The seven day program. The two week detox. Instant results!

The self-help industry is based around our need to be changed instantly. We are too busy to change ourselves, and we don’t really want to; it’s all too much effort really! We would much prefer going to a doctor to receive a pill that helps us become a nicer person.

“Here you are alan, take the green one first, that will give you a flatter stomach, and the red one will make you call your mother more often. All right? Next!”

We all like the result of change, because we like what people say about us, don’t we? “Oh, he’s a much nicer person now he’s stopped drinking so much.” “She looks so good now she’s lost some weight.” “He’s such a good boy now; he does all his homework straight after school.” “My wife’s so good now; she pays all the bills when they come in.” “He’s so good with money now, he’s saved up for a new car for us...”

It’s nice to be complemented on something good we have done, isn’t it? We like it when people notice our efforts, but there will always be some people saying “We never see him down the pub anymore, I don’t know what’s happened to him; he’s changed,” or “She’s no fun since she lost all that weight, all she cares about is her figure,” or “We can never play with him after school, he’s always rushing home to do his homework.” Seems you can’t win can you? You *should* stop drinking, but you’re no fun when you’re not drinking!

Some people like the change in you, and others just don’t like change, full stop. They don’t like that you have managed to change and they are still the same. They may feel jealous of you; they themselves may have tried to lose weight or cut down drinking but haven’t managed it, and for this, they criticise you in a round about fashion. “She’s no fun. The new clothes don’t suit her, she was much nicer before, I don’t like her much anymore.” In fact, what you really want to say is “I’m jealous she changed and I didn’t,” but are too afraid to.

But who are we changing for? Is it for ourselves, or is it for our family, friends, or our partners? We are certainly not changing for the benefit of mankind! It’s a lot closer to home than that.

Who cares in africa that I am giving up smoking in america? Who cares in russia that I have lost weight in england? Answer: No one. They wouldn’t even care if you started doing charity work to help the needy, the only people that care are those closest to you. The ones who love you and care about you, and the ones

whose opinions you value. You are changing to please these people, even if you don't notice it yourself.

If you were completely on your own, what would you change about yourself? What if there was no one to see that you had lost weight, what would be the point in all that hard work? What's the point in coming home to do your homework straight away every night, if there's no one to notice and say well done? Why would you change and pay your bills on time if you normally paid them late every month, and there was no one to hassle you? Why bother?

That's why we want change to come easy; because we're not doing it for ourselves most of the time. "Everyone says I'm fat, and I can't get a girlfriend, so I'm going to lose weight" not "I am aware that being overweight is dangerous to my health, so I will lose weight." "My doctor says that if I don't stop smoking I will die" not "I am aware that smoking is killing me, I find it harder to breath every day, so I will stop right now!"

We change because other people make us aware of things we are either unaware or in denial of. The more we become aware of ourselves in action throughout the day, the more we can see behaviours which are not good for the well-being of the system, or behaviours that could be improved upon to help us interact with society more easily, and with less stress. After all, none of us are perfect, nor will we ever be! The more awareness we have, the easier change becomes. It doesn't even require a personal commitment to yourself; it doesn't even require effort. It doesn't need you to keep telling yourself to change. You don't need to force yourself to change. You just need to see why.

Change is easy...

Of course it is. You are aware that something you do or say is not in the best interests of your system, and as an intelligent machine, able to modify its own behaviour instantaneously, that behaviour is modified to work in the best interests of the system. The end.

Aware

1. Having or showing knowledge or understanding or realisation or perception

"I am *aware* that drinking excess alcohol is not good for my health. I feel sick, I cannot think clearly. I fall out with people. I argue with my family. I fall over. I have no money. My job is suffering. So I will modify the behaviour that is not in the best interests of the system by abstaining from alcohol immediately."

"I am *aware* that not paying my bills on time leads me to have higher stress levels, so in the best interests of my system, I will modify my behaviour by paying my bills immediately."

"I am *aware* that by avoiding speaking with my mother, I make her upset. I am also aware that she will not always be around and that will make me sad. So in the best interests of my system, I will phone her immediately."

Change cannot come as a result of outside pressure. Change is not something that can be planned over time. Change comes about from awareness; and once we are aware, we can change immediately. If you are putting change off, that's a sure sign it's actually a *should* or *want* to change, not an awareness that what you are doing is not in the best interests of the system.

I do not want to talk to you like they do in the self-help books, but you really can change, right now. Not because you should, not because you want to, but because you are aware. You are aware of the benefits of change, you can see how change will improve the quality of your life and, more often than not, improve the quality of the lives of the people around you.

Real change can only come from inside each one of us. We must be aware of something so strongly that we have no other choice but to change our behaviour or our thinking. Up until now we have only discussed

behaviour in our examples, but change comes from the mind; not from thought, but from awareness. Change comes from the mind and can possibly stay in the mind, although it will probably have a knock on effect in the real world.

Thought

I don't like fat people; I'm not going to invite that girl from work to my party.

Awareness

She may be overweight, but I should try to understand why she eats so much, it may be a medical disorder, or maybe she has other problems I don't know about.

Thought Change

She is a human being. I work with her; I will get to know her better.

Action

Would you like to come to my party?

I know that's a simplistic example, but it can be applied to any thought/change situation.

Thought

I hate black people; they sell drugs on the streets; they are responsible for crime. They don't deserve to live in my country.

Awareness

Why do I hate black people? I don't know any, and as far as I know white people sell drugs and are responsible for crime. My hate is unjustified. I have never been hurt by a black man. They are citizens of the country, the same as I am.

Thought Change

A black man is a human being, the same as I am; I will stop judging them because of their skin colour. Everyone deserves to live on this earth. Not just me.

Action

I won't look for a black man to beat up after the pub tonight,

Take this and play with it on your own. Make up your own list. See how you can modify your thinking to modify your behaviour instantaneously. What could you change *right now* about yourself? Try it. It's exciting to see your own mind in action! This is only about you; you are not changing anything for anyone else, no one else even has to know. This is for you, and you alone. For the benefit of your system.

But straight away I can hear some of you saying "If it's this easy, how come nobody else has thought of it? Why haven't I read a book with this in it? I bet it doesn't work. It's too simple. I've tried everything; why should I believe that your method works? This is just the same as I've read in every other book!"

But this isn't a method; this is not a self-help book. I am not your guru; I don't want to change you. In fact, even if you change, I probably won't know about it unless you have your finger poised on a nuclear button; in which case, I must insist you work through the following example immediately!

Thought

I must protect my country from attack, our enemies are everywhere. Only by having this nuclear weapon can we be safe. Everyone wants to destroy us.

Awareness

If I fire this weapon my enemies will retaliate and my country will be destroyed. Although it helps to have a deterrent, they only have them because we do and vice versa. As I will be in a nuclear bunker I will probably survive, although I will be responsible for the deaths of millions of people and animals I cannot callously disregard as collateral damage.

Thought Change

This is not my planet. I am only here for a short time like everyone else. Instead of being afraid of people because they live in a different area of the earth and may speak a different language, I remember we are all living beings and I do not have the right to decide life or death. I am a politician. It's just a job; I was elected

to look after the interests of the people, but I also have a responsibility to the rest of the planet. I will offer the hand of friendship to everyone, even people I call my enemies.

Action

I will start dismantling my nuclear weapons.

People are always trying to change the world. They want people to stop bombing each other, stop taking drugs, stop cutting down the rain forests, stop animal testing, and stop killing animals.

Stop doing this, stop doing that.

Even if it is in the best interest of the system or the planet, people don't want to listen to them. Why? Because people hate being told what to do. Nobody wants to hear from a stranger that what they are doing is wrong.

Remember what we discussed earlier? You change for the people closest to you; the ones whose opinions you value. Well if you were a soldier and your mother appealed to you to stop going to war and killing other people, or if you were an addict and your brother said to you "Please stop taking drugs, you're destroying yourself, and I can't bear to see you like this," would you listen? You may or you may not. You may carry on exactly as before.

So if these are the closest people to you, the ones whose opinions you value, and you still don't change; what chance has external pressure got to change you?

"No More War!"

"Say NO to Drugs."

It just washes over your head, doesn't it? Why should you change if you don't want to? It's your life.

The only time external pressures can influence you is when you have already started to become aware of yourself; when you are ready for a change, and just need someone else to give you a final push; otherwise they might as well not bother. They may have changed, and they want you to change, but that's not the way it works. We are the most intelligent species on the planet, capable of complex thought and articulate speech; we want to work it out on our own, thank you very much.

The fact is we just don't like to be pressured into anything, do we? We always like to think it over, weigh up the pros and cons. We battle against ourselves. Should we, shouldn't we? But it's not buying a vacuum cleaner we're talking about here. This could be the change that alters the way you live; like giving up crime before you spend your life behind bars; something most of us would find easy, because it's not in the best interest of the system.

So why is it that some changes are easy for some people, but hard for others? Sorry to tell you this, but it's your brain! It becomes addicted to behaviours; it has become conditioned to thinking a certain way, and for you to try to change would cause it great pain; and when the brain feels pain you know about it. Your brain throws in all sorts of reasons why it isn't appropriate to change, why it would be a bad idea. So you start to feel afraid. What if the change is no good? What if you don't like who you become? What if the change isn't in your best interest? Here we have the final resistance to change after should – *want* and *but*.

What if?

What if; doubt; the fear that something may go wrong; your brain's last attempt to stop you from doing something you may live to regret later in life (it says), even if it is in the best interest of the system. So in a misplaced desire to protect you, your brain mistakenly offers you some sound advice against any serious desire to change.

If you had always paid your bills on time, or had always done your homework on time, there would be no need to change, would there? If you didn't drink too much, you wouldn't have to change to being abstinent, would you?

In one of the dictionary definitions of change it states: "*a difference that is usually pleasant*." I would say that no one would change if it was for the worse, although they may engage in thinking and behaviour that is not of benefit to the system. But who actively states: "I know I'm a bank manager with three lovely children and a nice house, but honey I've decided to change. I'm going to be a drug dealer" Does anyone say, "I know I'm getting excellent results at school, but I've decided to change; from now on, I'm going to be a failure!"

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

I think we can all agree that change, by its definition, must be an improvement to the system. Unfortunately when your brain has been used to a way of thinking or behaviour, it will resist change. And the longer it has been used to it, the more it puts up a resistance to change. “Change is dangerous,” it tells you. “You don’t know what could happen.”

“I should stop stealing from people. I want to stop stealing from people, but I need the money. What if I can’t get a job?”

It really is amazing what your brain tells you, isn’t it! Change is positive, but your brain puts objections wherever it can to allow the current behaviours and thoughts to continue. “After all,” it adds, “what if it doesn’t work out, this change, what if you don’t like it?” So you start to feel nervous and anxious about the change. “Maybe it isn’t such a good idea, maybe I should put it off until next month. After all, I’ve got a lot on at the moment and I’m quite stressed.” And you start to feel more relaxed, until next month comes, and then each month becomes more desperate and urgent, and you start using:

“I have to” and “I must”

*I **have** to go on a diet*

*I **must** stop smoking*

*I **have** to sort my bills out*

*I **must** get off the drugs*

*I **have** to do my homework*

*I **must** speak to my mother*

As with *should* or *want*, *have to* and *must* are in the future, because that is the tense where all these words belong. And although you should change, want to change, and lastly have to, or must change, you haven’t. Why? Because you are putting it off. You don’t want to go through the perceived hardship of change; you expect that change will be difficult, so you plan to change sometime in the future (*a time that is not now*). This keeps you and your protective brain happy for a short time, until you start wanting to change again; and the longer you put it off, the worse you feel about yourself. “I really, really want to change. I’m sick of doing this all the time. I am desperate to change.”

So change...

That’s it, just let yourself surrender. Don’t fight it. Once you’re aware of the desire to change, just let it happen. It’s when you start fighting it, that you start getting all the inner conflict. The voice of reason, arguing its case over and over why you shouldn’t change.

Don’t fight. Change and move on. Don’t keep thinking about it. Don’t keep talking about it. Through awareness of yourself and what is best for the system you did something for yourself that was a hundred percent improvement. Because you changed for you.

Right now

Change can never be in the future, it has to be right now. You have to be so clear in the moment that there is no conflict, and when it happens it takes approximately two seconds. We all spend our lives trying to change, when in reality all it takes is the time to say “I will never drink again.” “I will never take drugs again.” “I will do my homework every night starting right now.” “I will never fight with people again.” “I will not hit my wife anymore.” “I will dispose of my weapons starting right now.” “I will never kill another animal.”

The question is though, do you really mean it? Have you gone through the process of thought, awareness and thought change, before action? Because if you just start at action, your good old brain will fill in the thoughts for you about why it isn’t a good idea to change, and that just leads to more inner conflict.

I’m sure many of you will be wondering “If I change, what’s to stop me going back to my old thoughts and behaviours?” and the answer is – nothing! You can do anything you wish, you belong to the most

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

intelligent species on the planet, and if you want to think a certain way you can. It's your right!

But if you want to go back to a thought or behaviour that isn't for the good of the system, and it was something you deeply wanted to change about yourself, but couldn't...

“I did want to stop smoking. I've tried and tried, but I keep going back to it,”

“I did want to get out of the gang. I tried and tried, but I just couldn't,”

“I wish I could be less violent. I have tried, I've had counselling and it didn't work,”

Then maybe change wasn't strong enough for you. Sometimes a major change needs an internal revolution.

[Back to Index](#)

Chaos

1. *A state of extreme confusion and disorder*
2. *The formless and disordered state of matter before the creation of the cosmos*

The politicians would always have you believe, that without them, their policies, and their laws; that the world would become chaotic. They would have you believe that good order is the only thing that stop us from behaving like wild animals. But if you haven't been asleep for the last thousand years you may have noticed that, actually, the world is in chaos; thanks to the very people who tell you you can't do without them. Oh, I forgot, you have been asleep; for most of your life anyway. So, wake up!

*"I promise to lead you out of confusion, into more confusion!"
"Hooray!!" cry the people*

For as long as there have been rulers, they have believed, somewhat egotistically, that the people need them. What they seem to be forgetting is that they need the people! Well, they need their money, and their loyalty, and support, any time they fancy having a war with some other ruler. And that's just for starters.

The problem is, that through lack of awareness and insight, the people have believed them when they say they know what is best, and will pretty much go along with any reasonable statement issued by the ruler of the day.

But what happens when people attempt to overthrow the ruler? Of course, as predicted, utter chaos! The people burn down buildings, steal whatever they can get their hands on, rape any women they see, and fire their weapons into the air and into each other.

But what happens to the natural world during this chaos? Pretty much nothing (unless they decide to detonate an atomic bomb). The sun still rises, the sun still sets, the birds still sing, and the animals still go about their business. The earth still moves around the sun, and all is perfect.

And back in the human world... People running through the streets, stabbing, slashing at people, breaking windows, burning cars. Chanting "Death to all who support the leader!"

And back in the natural world... The sun is going down over the horizon, the birds are beginning to nest in the trees; there is a cool breeze in the air, and some of the trees start swaying gently.

And back in the human world... "Get him," they cry, as a group of armed men chase some poor unfortunate as he stumbles in the road. They slash and beat him, his face covered in blood, until someone produces a weapon and shoots him in the head. They jump up and down for joy waving their weapons in the air and move out to find their next victim.

And back in the natural world, a bird flies silently overhead.

We are in chaos!

That is to say, the human world is in chaos. The natural world of which we so desperately wish to disassociate ourselves from continues in perfect order. Everywhere we turn, Man has got himself into chaos. He cannot see a way out of it, except for believing in a god who will make it all right in the next life! Surely that cannot be right. If nature is so perfect and we are part of nature, what's the problem?

Out of chaos came everything, it is said, except chaos happened several billion years ago. The chaos we are creating for ourselves has taken no more than a few thousand years. So maybe it will take us another billion or so years to reverse the process we have started. But I predict that it will be too late.

During the last century there were two world wars; and during the second one, two atomic bombs were dropped (which had to be dropped you understand, to avoid the chaos of more war). There have been countless wars in africa, south america, europe, and asia. Tens of millions have been murdered, all in the name of restoring order. But we have all been lied to, again and again, by those who seek to divide us and rule over us. They have told us that so and so is our enemy and we should fight him. But the idea of an enemy is purely man-made; devised by those who wish to expand their empires and acquire more land and riches.

How long will it be before the war to end all wars is started? How long before powerful men and their desires are the undoing of all of us? It is time we woke up to the chaos that has been created. It is time we restored order – without those in power. So how do we do it? Let us go into this carefully.

**

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

I see that Man is in chaos. I see that nature is order, and I say that I want to be in order too. As someone is in power helping direct all the chaos, I see that the only way to restore order is to remove him. If I revolt violently there will much bloodshed on both sides with no guarantee we will be successful; and surely, if we fight chaos with violence then all we still have is chaos. Do you understand?

On the other hand, we could use civil disobedience (used to remove the british from power in india), whereby we do nothing the one in power wants us to do. He may eventually give up, and say “Ok, you win,” and step down, but who is to replace him? You?

So you try to create a new society not based on the old order, but it is still based on Man’s definition of order, not natural order; so eventually (or sooner) chaos starts to creep in again. “Why is the world still in chaos?” you cry, “I have done everything to restore the natural order, but nothing is working.”

The reason it is not working, is because we haven’t got a clue! Although we like to think we do. It is the same every time Man tries to interfere with a natural process. We want to help, but as we do not see the whole, we end up making it worse. This happens because we ourselves are fragmented.

In india they used passive resistance to great effect, until it came time to sort out how the country was going to be run. The muslims didn’t want to be part of the hindu government, so they split the country in two, forming pakistan in the process, uprooting countless families, and dividing a nation! They still fight over a disputed territory, called kashmir, right now.

So in trying to remove the powerful british from their country they ended up as adversaries and replaced one ruler with two! Pure chaos!

Any other bright ideas?

As you will see later, there is no way we can think our way out of a chaotic society, as it was thought that made it chaotic in the first place. So for now, we need to go back to the universe and ask its help to stop thinking! I decided to do us all a favour and picked up the phone.

Me: Hi, is that the universe?
Universe: Speaking.
Me: Oh, hi there. You don’t know me; I’m a human from the planet earth.
Universe: Oh yes. What can I do for *you*?
Me: You don’t seem very pleased to hear from me?
Universe: Can you blame me? After all you’ve done?
Me: Sorry about that, it’s not my fault, it’s everyone else.
Universe: Are you people trying to make my life difficult?
Me: No. In fact that’s why I’m calling. I want to help you. I want to restore order to the world and remove chaos. I hear you’re the man for the job.
Universe: When I left it, there was no chaos.
Me: Well, there is now unfortunately, and everyone’s blaming everyone else. The Muslims say it was the christians; the arabs say it was the americans; and the americans blame everyone who isn’t american.
Universe: I see... So what can I do to help?
Me: You can fix it... (hears laughter) What’s so funny?
Universe: You humans, you think you can just call someone up and they’ll make it all right.
Me: But you’re our last hope to remove the chaos we have created and make us whole again.
Universe: And what do you think will happen if I removed chaos and restored order? After all, the humans would still be there, and they would start creating chaos again.
Me: So there is no answer? You can’t help us?
Universe: You are beyond help; you are on your own. Perhaps it would be better if the human race had never been created at all.
Me: Now hang on!
Universe: Sorry, just joking. I can offer you one last thought before I go and have my dinner. If you are indivisible, if you are whole; then where is the chaos?

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Me: I don't follow.

Universe: You have been created as part of me. You contain my molecules. You are indivisible from me. You have no mind which is not my mind. I am not in chaos. Therefore you are not in chaos. You are whole.

Me: But what about the fighting, the power, the bloodshed?

Universe: Sorry, got to go, my dinner's getting cold.

And then I got it, just after I put the phone down. Everything is in perfect order. The rulers are in perfect order. The fighters are in perfect order. The greedy man is in perfect order. There is no separation. The only thing that is not in order is thought, which is man-made. All the players are whole. When you remove the thinking the illusion drops, and we see there is no chaos. Do you understand? When I think, I am chaos. When I "just am," I am order. See it now.

When the greedy man who is whole sees he is greedy, and lets it float off into the universe, he is still whole, but now there is order in his life.

When the tyrant who is whole sees he is tyrannical, and lets it float off into the universe, he is still whole, but now there is order in his life.

You do not need to force yourself to be anything other than you are, but you must accept it, and you must be aware of the movement of your mind. When you lose that awareness; thought, which is "me," "the individual," creeps back in. And we all know what "me" can do!

We cannot change everything in the world by force. But if you are part of the world, which you are, then changing yourself affects everything else. It seems too simple to be true, but don't believe me. Try it out for yourselves!

[Back to Index](#)

Charity

1. *A foundation created to promote the public good (not for assistance to any particular individuals)*
2. *A kindly and lenient attitude toward people*
3. *An activity or gift that benefits the public at large*
4. *An institution set up to provide help to the needy*

It is always encouraging to see compassion alive and well in society, in the form of charity. It always amazes me the number of people who do charity work, or who donate money to charities. My mother worked for the red cross for one day a week for nearly twenty years. My father has dedicated himself to doing charity work since he retired from business. So why do they do it? Why do people like my parents, and others, decide to work as a volunteer in an organisation to help other people?

In the beginning, I thought it was ego. I thought they were doing it so they could tell their friends “Oh, I do charity work you know,” but in the end I just couldn’t see that. As a matter of fact, I think it was me who wanted to do charity work so I could impress people with my “giving nature.” For others though, they just wanted to help; so I concluded that it must be compassion.

I also was under the impression that it was only wealthy people who did charity work, but once again I was proved wrong, having seen people from all walks of life involved.

So who are these armies of people, helping people less fortunate than themselves? Who are the people who are concerned with the homeless, animals, or saving the planet? Are they just self-interested parties wanting to promote their own cause or agenda, and what are their real aims? Do they want to convert people to their religion? Because it does seem that many charities have affiliations to religious organisations.

What do they *really* want? What is their hidden agenda? Are they secret societies, set up to advance themselves under the guise of helping others, or is the helping real? These, and many other questions, went through my head prior to writing this topic.

As you may have read in other topics, I am currently volunteering at a buddhist retreat on a scottish island, whose aims are to promote world peace and health; but I had to ask myself (cynically you may add), “Are they just trying to spread their religious beliefs under the guise of developing a community dedicated to world peace? Do they secretly want everyone in the world to be a buddhist?”

What matters is that they are trying to help!

How many of us care? I mean, really care? Aren’t we all so interested in “me,” that we can’t see anyone else? That’s definitely the way I was, only thinking about myself; so does it really matter that they are from a religious group, or a political organisation if they are offering assistance? Is it not better that people help in any way they can, even if they do have their own agenda; or are we (by accepting their charity) also accepting their beliefs?

Let me ask you one question: Would the world be a better place if there were no charities? I am sure that most of you would agree that it would not. There is so much good done by them worldwide, that millions of people would suffer if their assistance was to be removed; and let’s not forget you, the giving public, who “religiously” give to charities every time you see a box being shaken, or an appeal on television.

In response to one appeal on television, I sponsored a child in india. I don’t know, it just felt like a good way to spend forty dollars a month, considering it was easy for me to spend that in one night in the pub! I let it lapse after two years, as I ran out of money; but I hope that whatever I gave, helped.

It’s the same as the tv campaigns to help the starving children in africa. Millions of pounds is raised in this way. So we should all give ourselves a big pat on the back for helping out less fortunate people than ourselves, with money we can well afford to give. I hear many of you thinking: “Why should I give my hard earned money to charity,” but no one ever forces you to do it. After all, that’s why it’s called charity, because you are being charitable!

Others may think it’s the government’s job to be charitable on our behalf, as it is our money they are spending, but governments aren’t equipped to help. That’s why we need the oxfams and the red crosses of this world, and the thousands of other small charities with their armies of unpaid volunteers to lend a hand.

Charity = compassion in action

How many times have you seen a soup van surrounded by drunks and the homeless, with a volunteer faithfully handing out soup, paid for and cooked by others out of compassion for people less fortunate than

themselves? Or the homeless hostels that have been set up in cities, to cater for people with mental illness, and/or drug and alcohol addiction?

Although we all have our faults, there are a large number of us who are truly compassionate and help someone in need if we can, even if it is just giving our debit card details over the phone. It used to be just older people who helped, but now there are many young people who volunteer their time, and are happy to donate money.

So what makes a volunteer? What makes someone give up their time to help other less fortunate people than themselves, when most people would prefer to be just enjoying themselves? How does someone become a compassionate individual? First, we have to look at parents.

If the parents are the type of people who believe in helping others, it is more than likely that you will adopt the same belief structure (this also works in reverse of course), the second is your immediate social group, and third, whether you belong to any other group that places a value on helping others. It is rare that you would just wake up in the morning and decide to help others, after a lifetime of only helping yourself, wouldn't you say? Or is it?

Can someone who has no compassion for others decide to help? Of course! Through awareness!

I became aware that helping others was of much greater value to the world than only helping myself. Awareness that I did not exist alone in the world, and that everything is interconnected. I realised through helping others, I was helping myself to let go of my own sense of self-importance.

I have now made a commitment, or vow, to dedicate myself to the service of others. So what does that mean? Does that mean I will no longer earn any money wandering the streets looking for anyone to help? No of course not! I have to be able to provide for myself, otherwise I will be in need of help. There is no point in trying to help and requiring support yourself! It defeats the object of helping.

During my time at the retreat I spoke to several volunteers who were claiming a tax credit (worth about forty pounds a week) from the government, which is paid by you and I, in the form of tax levied against us. I couldn't understand why they were claiming money and saying they were volunteering. One could argue that the fact that they were volunteering at all to work on a charitable project was worth a measly forty pounds a week, given that the governments of the world spend billions of pounds a year on weapons designed to kill people!

One volunteer did slightly annoy me when he said: "I don't need money to live in the world, I am free of capitalism and attachment to material possessions, look at those sad people out there doing the same thing day in day out." I quickly had to point out to him that the island he was living on was funded by a charity, which in turn was funded by ordinary people doing the same thing day in and day out. But that is relatively unimportant here.

One thing that does concern me though, is that although most charities are doing a great job in the world helping people lead "better" lives, I am all too aware that the money that goes into charities has to come from somewhere; and that somewhere may be doing more harm than good in its own business. You may say that it doesn't matter what the source is, as long as people are helping, but in my opinion, it does. Let me give you a scenario to contemplate for a moment.

Company X – The charity

Company X is a real estate developer owned by two brothers. Both of them are fairly religious, and go to church every Sunday, where they always put some money in the plate to help with the upkeep of the church. Neither of the brothers has ever been in any trouble; and they regularly help out at the local soup van for the homeless, and in a charity shop run by an organisation helping starving people around the world.

They come from a wealthy family, whose philanthropy (*voluntary promotion of human welfare*) has been well noted over the years. They organise charity dinners several times a year, and have helped raise millions of pounds for environmental charities caring for the rainforests, as well as donating several million pounds of their own money, to water sanitisation projects in South Asia. This work has saved thousands of children and adults from death and diseases, such as cholera.

They have been awarded various medals for their work by the Queen. The brothers plan to sell their business in ten years, and set up a charitable foundation with forty percent of the money raised. The rest they

plan to donate to various charities in their wills.

I think you'd agree these two men are very charitable! They are fictional, but there are many people like them in the world. Can you find anything to fault them? Looking at that resume, I would say not! Now that's all wrapped up nicely, and we can move on. Or can we?

Maybe we need to look at these two holier than thou characters a little more closely. Or should we just accept that they donate money, help people, and that's the end of it? It does seem to me that whenever somebody gets rich enough to give away lots of their own money, there has to be a cost somewhere else, do you agree?

It is precisely that cost we will be investigating here.

You see, Company X buys green-belt and urban land, primarily to develop shopping centres and supermarkets. That's it. Their clients in turn open shops, and the public get what they want. Lots of everything. What's the problem with that?

Let's go through it one more time. Real estate developer buys field, builds something that people pay money for, which in turn gives the public what they want. Easy! And that's the whole problem. Everything seems fine until you shine a spotlight on it, and start uncovering the truth.

Let's start to de-construct this Company X, shall we? They buy up a piece of green land (by green, we mean nothing on it). They bring in their builders, who require massive amounts of bricks, concrete, and glass. They build a tarmac car park, big enough to hold several thousand cars (you'll need a car because it's in the middle of nowhere, and anyway how will you get all that shopping home). They invite companies to lease their properties within the shopping centre, and get replies from a diverse range of retailers, including one supermarket whose products come from all over the world. Flown in by air, shipped by sea, and road freighted.

The farmers, who produce the items for export, have to make space available in the fields for products that are not going to be for local consumption, thereby changing the local landscape. The labourers, who work in the fields for these farmers in far away countries, are paid a measly wage, and struggle to make ends meet. The farmer uses tin, plastic, cardboard, etc. to package the products, and then huge amounts of fuel is used to ship the products to the distribution centre, where they are stored using electricity, until they are shipped by road to the supermarket.

The consumer arrives by car at the supermarket causing, not only more traffic, but also pollution. The shopping is then done under one megawatt of lighting, and carted off in its plastic packaging in a plastic bag to the car, which is driven home.

Are you with me so far?

The second retailer who rents a space in Company X's shopping centre, is a cheap clothes retailer.

People can buy fashionable clothes for next to nothing. Why? Because the retailer has them manufactured in a far away country, where the labour is cheap. To fulfil the orders, the overseas manufacturer has to grow huge amounts of cotton (not destined for the local market), and uses huge amounts of resources making the products, which will go for cheaper than a cup of coffee in some parts of the western world. These cheap products encourage the population to buy products they don't need, just because they are cheap; which in turn fuels a demand for more cheap products, which requires someone to suffer in a factory in asia as a result.

The third retailer who rents a space in Company X's shopping centre, is a fast food chain. They already have thousands of branches worldwide. People can buy cheap hamburgers, chips, and fizzy drinks from the company, because they mass farm animals. This involves clearing huge spaces for the cattle etc. to graze (or large sheds with thousands of cages in them, if they sell chicken), and they also require huge areas of farming land to be used for the sole purpose of producing foodstuffs for the cattle. Huge amounts of water are also needed. Then they must have huge fields for the production of potatoes, for the chips. Soft drink companies use huge amounts of water for their products, and transport them in plastic bottles all over the world. People then come into the fast food outlet, buy food that is nutritionally sub-standard, and then drop litter all over the countryside.

Company X – world saviour

Soon there are several hundred retailers in the shopping centre. What sort of impact do you think Company X has made, apart from a huge plus on their bank balance? If you look at, what some would see as, the positive side, they have created jobs for all the people involved in building the centre, and jobs for all retailer workers, and jobs for all the suppliers, and the support workers. Wow, these brothers are saints, just look at all the employment they have created!

The employment then provides the means for these workers to earn money to pay their bills, and then spend it all at the shopping centre! Not only are local jobs are created; some might argue that people are better off in the “cheap,” sorry, “developing” countries, and that without the shopping centres and retailers, these poor people would have no food.

But whenever someone wants to do something to their own advantage they will always come up with a constructive argument. It has been done on many occasions when governments have wanted to invade a country! But the question we have to ask ourselves is “are jobs the only key indicator for humanity?” “Is providing employment at any cost what we are here for?” One would hope not.

We would all agree that people have to have sanitary living conditions, and plentiful food and water, but remember, people have survived for thousands of years without factories giving them employment – factories have only been around since the industrial revolution, some 200 odd years ago.

The ends can never justify the means, and, in Company X’s case, just because they give a few million pounds to help the poor, does not excuse the social and environmental damage they are causing – all because they want to earn more money.

Do not be fooled by people’s generosity. Look behind the veil. Find out the truth for yourself. I don’t want to appear paranoid, but when companies and individuals are giving away lots of money I start to sense just a little bit of “guilt” creeping in.

You will notice that when rich people are generous with money towards the more needy, the sums of money involved seem huge to us; but in proportion to their wealth. they are small. After all, a rich man doesn’t stay rich if he gives away all his money. Please look into this with me closely.

You may think I am being unduly unkind to the two brothers who seem to be only concerned with others, but at the heart of their empire is greed, not compassion.

Think about it. Why do we need charity? It is because of a fundamental imbalance between the have’s and the have not’s. The have’s feel guilty about having, and the have not’s feel jealous that the have’s have! Do you follow? So the have’s make themselves feel less guilty about having, by giving away a little of what they have to the have not’s! Thereby redressing the balance (in their minds).

The problem with charity is we think everyone needs our help; that they are poor and wretched; that because they don’t have what we have, we should help them get it.

We’ve all seen the newsreels of wailing mothers and their children, in the midst of an earthquake or flood, and we feel compelled to get our credit cards out, and phone the charity to pledge a donation. What we may not know is that the credit card company is making tens of millions out of the misery of others who cannot afford to pay it back, and the bank behind the credit card may be investing heavily in businesses that do more harm (environmental and social) than good in the country you are pledging to help! It’s an ethical minefield you have to tread *very* carefully around.

The company you use to make your donation may itself be causing terrible problems in the world.

I remember paying for the sponsorship of that boy in india with my credit card. I wonder how many people are suffering as a result of having that credit card!

So what should we do? Should we stop large companies from donating money to charity? Should we let all those people suffer? Come on! It’s just a small shopping centre, think about it. So the environment may suffer a bit, and people in the developing world may have to work in sweat shops fourteen hours a day, and forests may have to be cleared a teeny bit. But isn’t it a small price to pay for saving all those poor children.... What do you think?

Is charity necessary?

What we seem to be forgetting, is that humans are the most resourceful species on the planet, and have managed to survive through such minor troubles as the ice age. I am not trying to belittle the suffering that people go through on this earth, but people are well equipped (psychologically and physically), for disasters. No one is poor and helpless unless they truly choose to let themselves be that way. The natural human drive is to survive, and the human will try to survive at all costs.

What we see as poor is only because they seem to have so little compared with ourselves. We need shelter, simple clothing, food, and water, that's all; all other *needs* have been invented by humans. Giving the poor jobs, decent housing, and a shopping centre in bangladesh, isn't going to make them happy! Well, it may do superficially; it seems to have worked here in the west.

It is worth remembering, that if everyone in the world had access to the lifestyle we have in the west, we would run out of natural resources very, very, very quickly. So it's a good job that most people in countries like china, ride bicycles, or there wouldn't be enough oil to go around to make the petroleum to fuel the car to pollute the environment! If people are helped too much our charity might just be the undoing of us all.

Most of the problems that people find themselves requiring the aid of charitable organisations are because of other humans. In our desire for success, we trample over the environment, and others less strong than ourselves. We create cities that favour the strong. We create work environments that favour those who are already wealthy. We create a culture that relies on people having plenty of money. What chance do people have if they do not happen to fit into that way of living? They get left behind, that's what.

The poorly educated, the mentally retarded, the addicted, the socially inept; these are the people who are helped by charity, because everyone else is only concerned with the fast track to success. Money, money, money, and the stuff it can buy. That's why we need charities; otherwise these people would just fall off the edge and die.

**

Half way through this topic I left the retreat and am now working for an educational trust that attempts to help young people aged between 16 and 25, with severe learning difficulties, and emotional/psychological disorders. The charity tries to help them, through the development of craft (*the skilled practice of a practical occupation*) skills, and I, alongside my girlfriend, am a house-parent. This involves caring for them all term without a day off, trying to teach them social skills, and help them become a bit more independent. This is another charity funded by the taxpayer. It may or may not help the students to become better human beings, or become contributors to society, but at least this college is trying, whereas most people would have abandoned these young people a long time ago.

It costs more a year to keep them than I have ever earned, and they don't seem to appreciate it; but we keep doing it, because it might just help them, and that in turn might help society in the long term. Will I keep doing this job? Probably not. The students are difficult to work with, and it is stressful, but I believe it fits with my ethos of being self-supportive whilst being of service to others more needy than myself. I do not believe that working for a large commercial organisation could fulfil this.

Is human charity a genetic trait?

I just can't see how it can be. Through this exploration with you today, I now believe that Man is not inherently charitable to his fellow-man, and there is no natural instinct to help others in far away places from leading a thoroughly miserable life.

There has to be an intermediary, a go-between; someone who bridges the gap between the needy and the people who will be *made* to be charitable, although it does take a lot of effort for the charity (the go-between) to wrestle time and/or money out of those of us well able to help. Of course, some people will never be convinced to help.

A good example of a need for an intermediary is the "big issue" sellers I often watch in the street, desperately trying to sell their (informative) magazine. They can stand outside newsagents where people happily buy £5.00 worth of other magazines. On being confronted by the homeless person's cry of "Big Issue?" the people who have bought some glossy magazines, make some sound resembling "no thanks," and

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

shuffle off hiding their face, looking uncomfortable. I have even seen people who do not buy the big issue (*a magazine sold by homeless people on the street to help them get on their feet. They buy it for 75p in the uk and sell it for £1.50*), yet one block down, put money into the collection tin of another charity! Why?

Is it because they don't like the "big issue?" Doubtful. It is a good magazine, good value for money, and directly helps poor people. Unfortunately, I think it's more to do with the seller. I know this sounds terrible, but I have in the past noticed myself avoiding a certain "big issue" seller, because of the way he looks, or because his nails or his teeth are horrible. Maybe we are scared of people who look different or have problems? So you can see why perhaps the man preferred to put his money in the charity box of the smiling, well dressed elderly lady one block down.

What do you think? Are we naturally charitable, or are we selfish? Are we only concerned with our needs, or do we consider the needs of others as well as our own? There's an old expression that says "look after number one," and we all know who that is – me!

Maybe we do have to look after number one first, but we also have to consider our fellow Man, after all, I do not exist in isolation. I am in relationship with you, and we are both in relationship with the rest of the world. If we want to progress together as a planet, we have to start asking the question: "Will what I am about to do affect anyone else in the world negatively?"

If the answer is "yes," it will be on your conscience if you go ahead anyway! Still, you could always give large amounts of money to charity afterwards, and then you'll feel all better... Ahh, guilt relief, it's such a wonderful thing.

[Back to Index](#)

Children

1. *A human offspring (son or daughter) of any age*

It's easy to create a child, isn't it? You just need a couple of ingredients – a bit like making a cake. Take one man and one woman, place the male's erect penis inside the woman's vagina, and move it in and out for several minutes. Achieve male orgasm, and ejaculate millions of tiny sperm into the woman. The male sperms will swim furiously, and hey presto, if it's the right time of the month, one of the sperm will find an egg and fertilise it. The foetus will start growing; and nine months later, out pops a child. Easy! Anyone can do it!

Everyone wants children, it's biological, a human drive; and let's face it if we all stopped having children the world would soon start to become a pretty quiet place. Having children is probably one of the easiest things we can do in life, although I can hear you starting to say already "Do you know how hard it is having children?"

But what I'm talking about here is the physical act. It requires no education, no degrees, no intelligence, no money, no house. It also requires no job, no food, and no love (for the physical act). And finally, it requires no discipline, no responsibility, and no knowledge.

In fact, it requires nothing more than a man and a woman to have full sex at the right time for the egg to be fertilised. It is an act we are programmed for, in order to allow the continuance of the human race. We require no specialised knowledge. Even if you have never been to school, or have limited social skills don't worry, you too can have children. It's your right!

Now what?

Every second of the day, a child is born into the world, dependent on its mother for everything, not able to fend for itself, not able to speak, only to cry when it's hungry, and sleep when it's tired.

Being born, and surviving outside is a traumatic experience. In the womb there are no such problems. Nature takes care of everything. Even the mother doesn't have to worry about what to give the foetus to help it develop into a child; and even if she did worry, she wouldn't know what to do. She just has to sit back, and wait, until the day the waters break, and she is rushed to hospital to have it delivered.

You see, human birth is a complex procedure, not like that of a horse or a dog, whale or an elephant. Human birth requires something no other species requires, and that is the intervention of another human to assist with the birth – someone who knows what they're doing!

The baby has to be assisted out of the birth canal, his bottom slapped to encourage him to breathe on his own, and the umbilical cord (that is attached to the navel), removed, and tied off neatly. Next he is cleaned by a nurse, wrapped in a blanket, and if everything is healthy with the child, he is handed to the mother.

It's not like the nature programs we see on the television, is it? The picture of the horse giving birth to the foal, it stumbling to its feet, and the mother licking it clean. Human birth is not like this at all. On regular occasions now, the baby even has to be delivered by caesarean section (*the delivery of a foetus by surgical incision through the abdominal wall and uterus*). Surely there is something strange going on when nature has to be assisted! All of that developmental work completed without human assistance, then finally a team of medical experts needed for the delivery or birth of the child.

But if we think back in time, long before hospitals were invented, births must have been a very different affair; but nonetheless, evolution seems to have stopped short. We, the most advanced being on the planet, cannot bring a child into the world without the help of someone else.

It would be funny to think of a team of lions on hand to help with the birth of the newest addition to their fold; or a team of whales ready to intervene in case there were problems with the birth of their latest addition! But we're not here to discuss evolution, so let us continue our investigation.

To recap:

- A. Male getting female pregnant – Easy.
- B. Mother feeding the foetus – Easy.
- C. Mother taking control of the development of the foetus – Easy.
- D. Giving birth – Painful, but easy due to the medical staff on hand to assist.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

So far so good; although I'm sure there are a lot of you starting to think out loud: "It's not easy! Do you know what I had to go through? My child had a lot of problems, I had to..." Ok, but let's keep focussed. We are talking about the relative skill needed in order to get to the point of giving birth to a human child, who is the most advanced being on the planet, and I think, looking at the evidence, that it's pretty easy compared to studying say, quantum physics or indeed, medicine.

It's a girl!

The baby is born, the waiting is over, you have a beautiful girl; except there's one small problem. You live in a refugee camp in africa, where everybody is starving and water is scarce, and you already have two children you can barely feed. Tell me; is it still your *right* to have children?

Are you exercising your biological right to procreate – a natural and essential task in the continued survival of the human race; or is it a failure on your part (and the father's) to exercise personal responsibility? Is it the careless, selfish act of a man determined for the pleasure of an orgasm, without thought to the consequences? Or is it a lack of education, or caring on the part of the female about the consequences; a need to fill an empty life, to make her life more complete?

"Ever since I was young I knew I wanted children"

How many children are born every year to single teenage mothers, or married couples, where the husband is violent, where the parents have no money, no jobs, boyfriend in jail, mother on social welfare; or the family that are together, but live in a country where there is little food, or live in a country ravaged by war or disease?

You have exercised your right – a right that is only made possible by the amazing body you inhabit (male or female). You have brought a child into the world; a baby who, whether you like it or not, is going to be dependent on you for several years to come, for such things such as:

- A. Food
- B. Water
- C. Shelter
- D. Warmth
- E. Love
- F. Time
- G. Learning

If you have problems, you can be sure that your child is about to start having problems, pretty much soon after he or she is born. You may say: "But I love my child, we'll get through it," but it soon becomes apparent that if you can't look after yourself; if you are not in balance with the world; the chances are, your child will not be in balance either. This is not a criticism of people who choose to have children at the wrong time, or accidentally happen to get pregnant. After all, there is no right time to have children; this is an appeal to our senses as human beings, the most intelligent beings on the planet. An appeal that asks whenever we are in the situation where we could create life.

"Am I taking personal responsibility for the consequence of my actions?"

"What are the consequences of creating a child now. Am I psychologically prepared?"

"Can I bring up a child without assistance from the state, charity, or other aid organisation?"

If the answer to any of these questions is no, you must take responsibility for yourself, and the responsibility of creating life. Although creating life is an act of love, with it must come personal responsibility. This is not

just about your pleasure, and letting yourself go.

“I don’t know how it happened.”

“I was drunk.”

“I just felt like it.”

“I got carried away.”

This is the biggest responsibility you will ever take in your life – not taking on a mortgage, getting married, or being promoted to managing director. This is one thing that stands alone as the greatest feat a human can perform over the course of their life.

This is what it means to be human – not to design new cars, run multinational corporations, become a monk, work for charitable organisations, or build rockets that can reach the moon. This is so simple, anyone can do it. You don’t need a million dollars; you don’t have to believe in god; you don’t even have to be happy!

All you need is two ingredients: One man and one woman

It is after the birth that it becomes difficult, which is why you have to take personal responsibility *before* engaging in an act that can create life. Look at the pictures on the television of the poor starving children in africa; how they tell you that five pounds a month can help these children live a better life – that without this help, many millions will die. How do you feel? How many of you would not pick up the phone, and pledge money to save starving children.

Famous people, all over the world, are desperately trying to draw awareness to their plight. To convince world leaders to help; they are committed to helping these children. I even sponsored a child. After all, it is natural for humans to show empathy when another is suffering, that is a great quality of being human.

Look at their mothers, how sad they look, their hands outstretched as they grasp for a morsel of food that can feed their baby. The tears, the emotional anguish of seeing their baby dying, the bloated stomachs, the doctors tirelessly working to save them. How we feel sorry for them, the poor mothers and fathers looking on helplessly.

But wait a minute. Let’s re-run this advert in our mind. Let’s remove the empathy for the family, and apply the following questions we asked ourselves a moment ago. Do you think the father or mother asked themselves these questions? Or how about the single mother pushing a pram down the street, living on social welfare; do you think she asked herself these questions?

“Am I taking personal responsibility for the consequences of my actions?”

“What are the consequences of creating a child now, am I psychologically prepared?”

“Can I bring up a child without assistance from the state, charity, or other aid organisation?”

And of course, the inner voice strikes up: “She didn’t know she was going to get pregnant.” “It was an accident.” “She was getting older, she needed to have children before it was too late.” “It’s her right to have children if she wants;” and indeed, there are always explanations for not taking personal responsibility. These are just a few of them.

Imagine a continent like africa, where the people took personal responsibility by not having children, where they worked to make their lives better, to provide themselves with food, and fresh water, shelter, and employment. Imagine doing this before having children. How much better would their world be? Imagine the single girl, with no education and no job. Imagine if she took responsibility to make her life better, to educate herself, to improve her self-esteem, by doing something good for herself. But of course, this is a hard process, and remember, having a child is not. What would you do?

“It’s my life. It’s my right to have children, and I’ll have children if I want to.”

It’s all too easy when someone else is taking responsibility for you.

[Back to Index](#)

Christmas

1. A christian holiday celebrating the birth of christ

Now I am not a religious man, but I know that Jesus Christ was supposedly born on the twenty fourth or twenty fifth of December a couple of thousand years ago, and following his birth, three wise men allegedly travelled many miles, guided by a star which led them to a place called Bethlehem, where they presented him with three gifts – gold, frankincense, and myrrh. That is the sum total of my knowledge of the origins of this festival.

Christmas was always a magical time for me when I was young. My parents always had a Christmas tree decorated with plastic balls, fairy lights, tinsel, and either an angel or a star atop; and I had a stocking at the end of my bed so Santa (Father Christmas) could leave me something small like a satsuma, or an apple.

On Christmas Eve, I would go to bed early, excited by the imminent arrival of the aforementioned Santa (that this had any religious significance was above me, and even if I had known about it, would have meant nothing compared to the mountain of presents I was expecting the next day).

Early next morning, I would rise, hoping it would be snowing (apparently Christmas is nicer in the snow: it makes it more “magical”), but even when I looked out and found it just grey and wet, it didn’t matter; I would rush down to the tree and start checking which cards had my name on them.

After an hour or so, my mum and dad would come down, and turn on the Christmas tree. We would all still be in our pyjamas, but within a couple of minutes the present giving would begin in earnest.

As always, there were many, many presents, and my dad and I rushed to open ours, carelessly ripping the wrapping paper that my mum had spent hours perfecting. After that was done, it was time to get ready to go to our neighbours for Christmas drinks.

To me, Christmas Day seemed to be a day where the grown-ups had a good excuse to get completely sloshed, before eating a massive turkey meal, whilst wearing a stupid paper hat and telling jokes out of the Christmas crackers. This would be followed by Christmas pudding, watching the Queen’s speech, and passing out on the sofa. For me it was a great time – that is, until my dad left us.

The next Christmas, something was different. The presents still came thick and fast, but my father wasn’t around, it was just me and my mum. We still went to the neighbours, and she still drank too much, but this time instead of the usually happy table there was a sad silence, and my mum would sit and cry the whole evening. Suddenly Christmas wasn’t such a magical time for me any longer.

The lead up to Christmas Day represented the anticipation of my mother’s sadness, but that’s enough of my drivelling on, let’s celebrate! And celebrate we do.

It’s a time of cheer, when families get together to drink and be merry; a time to consume and show off, a time where we can let our hair down, and not worry about any problems we may be having. If you’re a Christian you will probably go to church and sing a few hymns, but after that it’s back to the real business of enjoying yourself.

I’m sorry if you come from a culture that doesn’t celebrate Christmas and you’re reading this, especially if you live in the UK, where everything is closed, and there’s nothing to do. Still you could always work and provide us good “Christians” with a valuable service, such as making sure we can still buy petrol, and other goods.

Sorry, but Christmas doesn’t hold a lot for me. I see it as an excuse for Anglo-Saxons to get drunk and abuse each other, and get into more debt. Still, at least they are adding to the economies’ coffers whilst avoiding reality.

Whilst Christmas is magical for those with money and a stable home life, it is the most depressing time for those who don’t, like people with no job, or people who come from a broken home. For them, they get depressed because they see everyone else having “fun.” They may even feel angry and think: “Why are they enjoying themselves, and I’m not?” But Christmas fun is an illusion, albeit it one you can touch.

Some of you may accuse me of being a spoilsport, or even being a non-believer, but the purpose of this discussion is not to criticise, but to find out what is really going on in the mind at Christmas time, especially here in the West.

If there is a “magical” energy at Christmas, can you guess what might be causing it?

In the northern hemisphere, november comes, and winter looms; the skies darken, the leaves fall from the trees, and the light starts to fade earlier, and earlier; whilst in the southern hemisphere, winter is passing into spring, and the sun is getting hotter, but worldwide, the corporate santa wagon is just getting into full steam. Christmas is being created, all for us.

Plastic decorations start going up in the shops, images of “santa” are appearing everywhere, christmas tree farms open their doors after a year of silent growth; the retail music changes from mind bending pop, to christmas carols we all know and love. Colourful street lights are turned on by d-list celebrities, and throughout the land, people are climbing into red santa outfits and pulling on false white beards.

On television, the adverts change to include images of smiling reindeer, and jolly fat men ready to dish out presents to all. There are sleigh bells in the background, images of happiness abound... And guess what? We get caught up in the whole process of mass retail consumerism, masquerading as a time for giving and sharing!

The whole christmas roller-coaster first hit me when I was living in australia. Here I was, standing in shorts and sandals, and all around me were images of a cold christmas wonderland! It made me sick to see all the people rushing around like mad things trying to get “one last present” for the kids, as if their happiness depended on receiving a multitude of toys.

Then it struck me. Maybe people’s happiness *did* depend on receiving presents. When I brought this up with friends I was accused of being really negative and miserable, and “if I didn’t like it here I could go back to england.” But that feeling stayed with me, year after year, and still does.

This so called “magical” day is over in 24 hours, but there is a whole industry addicting us to it for the 12 months leading up to it. I even saw a christmas hamper saving scheme advertised in january for the following year.

“What waste,” I thought. “What time, energy, and money goes into this one day, all for a small slice of psychological happiness? Is this what we have become? The most intelligent species on the planet only concerned with even more greed and desire than we normally exhibit. What progress!”

Whether I think it is a waste of planetary resources and an unhealthy addiction will probably mean nothing to you. You won’t let me spoil your day of fun for you or your children.

“How can he deny the little ones! They just want to see santa! What’s the harm of that?”

Maybe in the “spirit of christmas” it’s good that people are nice to each other for one day of the year, but can’t you see how ridiculous the whole thing is? Why can’t we be nice to each other all year?

There is nothing wrong with giving each other small gifts, but why not give them for no reason, rather than because it’s christmas? I know that whatever else you decide to change after reading this book, the celebration of international present day will not be one of them, but can I ask you to do one thing? Sit and reflect for a short time on this day.

A time for quiet meditative reflection

Although I will be spending the day with my girlfriend’s family. A family who do not share my views, I plan to spend part of my day sitting, quietly reflecting on what I have created in the world...

**

December 26th 2007. Christmas is now passed, and as I expected, the christmas I wanted to create didn’t happen! The whole time was noisy and frivolous, with too much drinking and eating, and swapping of many presents. I found I was in so much conflict during this day.

On the one hand, I wanted no part of it, and wanted to spend the time alone in reflection, but on the other, I could see that for once, the whole family was united in the joy of getting dressed up for a special occasion, anticipating what would be inside the wrapping paper, and raising their glasses to each other; so I got showered, and dressed, and joined them.

They just couldn’t understand why I wouldn’t want to join in, especially as they had gone to so much trouble to buy and prepare everything; so rather than spoil their day – that they had been so looking forward to for months – I kept my mouth shut, sat down at the table and smiled. After all, they don’t want to hear about the world’s troubles on their special day. For all I know, they may think it’s just me who has troubles!

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Why wouldn't they? If everyone else is doing it, why shouldn't I?

I realise now that that's what we always do, isn't it? We give in; we conform; because we don't want to let other people down. We don't want them to think that we think differently, we don't want to come into conflict with others, even if it is on an important issue.

But this will be the last year I join in with the celebrations.

This day is too important a day for us to just spend even more money, drink even more wine, and eat even more animals. This is a time when we have to look at ourselves as a society, and see what misery and pain our thoughts, and actions, have inflicted on the rest of the world.

So maybe it will be just me next christmas day, alone with my thoughts, but that's ok, I have plenty to reflect on. Don't you?

[Back to Index](#)

City

1. *A large and densely populated urban area; may include several independent administrative districts*

I think it's fair to say that the modern city is about as far away from our natural state as we could ever get, save perhaps living underground; but on the whole, most people, if not love cities, tolerate them for what they can get out of them.

For starters, there are many employment opportunities, and then on top of that, you have arts, live music, theatre, opera, cinema, big shops, mixed together with seriously high density housing; oh, and maybe the odd park to add a sprinkling of greenery to the city (sort of like they do in an english pub with the adding of a garnish to your meal).

So what else is there, can anyone think of anything I have forgotten? Let's recap. We have employment, shops, housing, arts, and somewhere to walk the dog. I think that'll do for now.

When the first cities started appearing several thousand years ago (built because of the development of agriculture, and Man's ability to specialise), they were tiny affairs compared with today; with perhaps a few thousand people, bartering and trading away – a really vibrant community I am sure. And from those humble beginnings, the modern monster was born. From several thousand, to almost twenty million people in some of the world's largest cities. Twenty million people, all squashed together in a sprawling concrete metropolis!

And so, as the cities became more and more densely populated, due to the money and power that were being accumulated there, the city planners (I think that may be too grand a title for them) came up with a new way to cram more people in. They built upwards!

After the second world war they cleared the "slum" (*a district of a city marked by poverty and inferior living conditions*) areas of Britain, and replaced them with high rise blocks, which as we will see later, became the new "slums;" and they keep building more, and more, and more.

Don't complain about it. Celebrate it!

If you look out over your capital city, or if you happen to be on holiday, or on business, take a moment to find a tall structure to go up and have a look at the view. You have to admit that it's pretty amazing (being up high that is, not the city), as you look down – not because it's so ugly or the monuments are so beautiful, but because it is Man's testament to himself and to his abilities to create something out of nothing.

If you think of all the developments that have taken place over the last hundred years or so, it is nothing short of remarkable. Cities have now become such amazingly busy places. There is always something going on 24 hours a day, whether it is people dancing the night away in a nightclub, or maintenance men fixing the underground railway – it never stops. Wealth is continually being generated, new art and performances are shown; political and business leaders are continually making decisions; tourists are constantly visiting, and the people are swarming around like flies.

Millions of people, commuting in and out of the city every day for work. Deliveries being made. Everyone is on the move, going somewhere, and it creates a real buzz (excuse the pun) in the city. Everyone looks like they have something important to do, somewhere important to go, busy, busy, busy.

They finish their day's work, and they then sit on a packed train, or even sit in their cars for hours on end in traffic jams! They arrive home, stressed but satisfied; their work is done, until the next day – but at least they have helped to contribute.

Cities also host major sporting events, where visitors from all over the world come to see what is on offer. The city is cleaned up, beggars are flushed into the drains, graffiti is removed; flags go up, prices go up, and the games begin. You couldn't really imagine holding the olympic games in a small town could you? Only a city is good enough!

But what is a city really? I mean, beneath all the glamour, which is illusion? What is at the heart of the city beneath the fireworks at new year and the culture festivals? Let's explore this in a little more detail.

The joy of commuting

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

I used to commute into london on a regular basis. I lived about twenty five miles from the centre, which should take you about thirty minutes to complete in the car (on a sunday), but within minutes of starting my journey, I was stuck on the motorway crawling along at between zero and twenty miles per hour. I would take this opportunity to light a cigarette, drink my takeaway coffee, make a few phone calls (not at the same time you understand!), and listen to a cd.

Others would have their papers folded at the wheel, some even doing the crossword; so although the journey could take upwards of two hours, cost a fortune in fuel, and even more in parking; it was worth it. I was getting fairly well paid, and anyway, I kind of liked the excitement of sitting in the queue, knowing I would be going into the city. I even had a laugh when I used to see a huge sign, painted onto a fence that said “Why do I do this every day!” as we all crawled past it at two miles an hour.

The fun stopped when I started catching the train or the underground into work. There were never any seats available when I got on, and if there were, they were always between two extremely large people, and their bags. But coming home was worst of all, especially in the summer if the air conditioning wasn't working.

We were crammed in like sardines in a can, and you could always guarantee that someone's sweaty armpit would be stuck in your face. It was always a thoroughly unpleasant journey, whatever the temperature! One thing I did notice, was that the more expert commuters managed to fold their evening papers in a special way, so they could continue to read them with little hand movement!

Apart from commuting, I liked the city. I liked that my office was on the eleventh floor and I could look out on the people below. I liked the fast elevator that took me up and down in 8.4 seconds. I liked going for a hot sausage and bacon sandwich washed down with a cappuccino before work, going shopping at lunchtime, and I especially liked going out to the pub after work (if I wasn't driving). It was an exciting time for me, but a lifestyle I couldn't sustain.

Cities are the same... Everywhere

After a year of commuting, I left my london job on the friday, had a farewell party, and took a taxi home. That was it, no more cities for me; I was off to australia! I flew out on the sunday, arrived on the monday, but of course, I had forgotten that sydney was a city; and when I walked through the streets, found it to be smaller, somewhat cleaner, but nonetheless, much like london.

There were the same shops, the same bars, the same tall apartment buildings, and the same office skyscrapers. There were the usual street buskers and street beggars. The only difference I could see was that they had a nice bridge, over a nice harbour, the weather was good, and the police had guns; other than that, it was the same as any other city.

Over the last few years, I have visited many countries and many cities, and although they all have their own peculiarities and monuments, they all provide the same thing – employment, high density living and entertainment; always mixed in with a sprinkling of greenery.

I would like you to stop and think about your own city, whether you live there or just visit occasionally, and think what you like or dislike about it. Then ask yourself what is at the heart of the city. Some of you may think that the heart of the city is the people, and whilst I would agree that the people make it what it is, I think we may be missing something important here.

You see, during the day, most cities are bustling with people, but I have walked around the city centre of many cities (especially around the business district) late at night, and I can tell you that apart from the homeless, the criminally minded, and the odd party reveller, it is a pretty solitary place.

As the grey walls of the office buildings tower above you, and the pavement stretches out in front of you, it as if all life has left this place, like a deserted city left to rot by the inhabitants. The street lights are a depressing orange; fear creeps in to you, and you begin to wonder who or what might be round the next corner. The warmth of the people has been replaced by cold steel and glass. Concrete abounds. There is no life here. There is no connection with the earth. This is an alien landscape created by Man.

Life is sustained at night only by keeping people up dancing, drinking, and being entertained – otherwise there would be no reason to be there. You see, most people don't live in the center of the city, unless they have plenty of money. Ah, yes, money. Before I forget.

Money: Come and get it if you can

So behind all the glamour, the theatres, the live music venues, the nightclubs, the cinemas and the restaurants; what do we need cities for? Well it's not for living. We have plenty of space everywhere else for that (something the rich have found out). Cities exist because they are the centre of power, and with power comes money.

It didn't used to be like this though. The power and the wealth were distributed throughout the country, but as more and more of the rural industries closed, so people had to look for work elsewhere. They needed money, so they followed it. And it emanated from the city.

So people moved closer, they gave up their land and their connection with the earth, and found any space they could to be near a source of work. Some people became successful, but the majority stayed poor, no matter how hard they worked; and it is the same today: only in the west, people do not need to live in corrugated iron huts in "shanty towns" (*small crude shelters used as a dwelling*), they have been moved up in the world, up many feet into the sky in fact, into tower blocks.

Thousands of them were built in the uk after the second world war, and I'm sure it was the case in your country too. They were hailed as the new way to give poor people a decent place to live, away from the slums they had to inhabit; but quickly, these wonder structures became modern slums, inhabited by the poor, the insane, the criminal, the unemployed, the addicted. Soon they became like ghettos (*Any segregated mode of living or working that results from bias or stereotyping*), where the unwashed and the unwanted were kept out of sight of the wealthy classes. One by one, they were all stacked on top of each other. If they had any connection to the earth left, they had now lost it. They were now prisoners of the city, surrounded not by steel bars, but by concrete. Concrete everywhere.

Concrete

1. A strong hard building material composed of sand and gravel and cement and water

When it was invented, concrete must have been seen as a true godsend. A tough, cheap building material, just the thing to put up all those lovely housing blocks with. But to me, concrete is one of those materials that just doesn't fit in the world. It has no organic feel to it; it feels like it is – cold and dead. I don't know why. Maybe it is the way it absorbs sunlight or the way it stains when it is wet, what do you think?

Have a look at the concrete buildings in your city and see what sort of feeling you get. It's strange, but steel structures or glass buildings just don't have the feeling of death as concrete does, at least they reflect the light somehow. But in the fifties and sixties, concrete was the *de-rigueur* (*required by etiquette or usage or fashion*) of building materials. I personally would like to meet the man who invented it, give him a shake, and say "What did you think you were doing?"

So you could say that the concrete housing blocks were one of the single greatest mistakes the planners ever made, but as we know, they're human; and humans make mistakes. As we have said in other topics, any time someone has a grand idea, it usually means misery for the worst off in society.

I think they are demolishing the worst of them now, but in cramped cities it is always hard to find space for everyone, especially those who do not seem able to help themselves. So many people remain in their tiny apartments surrounded by drug dealers, delinquent children, the mentally unstable, the long term unemployed and the alcoholics; spread evenly between regular working people and immigrants, who just can't make enough (or don't have the motivation to make enough); all squeezed into concrete rabbit warrens, built many metres into the sky.

The people don't respect the buildings, because most of them don't respect themselves. They are disadvantaged strangers thrown together, because of necessity. The necessity of somewhere to live, in order to make money.

In london, on the opposite side of the river to the council managed blocks, there are also many tower blocks,

but these are apartment buildings, not built using the cheapest materials. These buildings have all the things the poor buildings don't have, including an air of refinement. They may have a doorman, or a concierge, or marble floors; and the attention to detail in the lift might be exquisite. These are not buildings for the disadvantaged, these are not buildings for the unemployed, or the mentally unstable; these are buildings for those who have made it! They may still rise into the sky, but this is a different story to the council owned blocks.

The people who inhabit these buildings, work in business, in the arts, in politics; they have a very busy social life. They are polite to each other, as they pass in the morning and evening. All in all, a very different story. Back in the council block there is fear, there is anger, there is hatred, there is alienation, poverty; and back in the nice apartment block, there is laughter, classical music and fine ornaments; and back in the council block there is cheap takeaway food, satellite tv, and flat packed furniture from one of the big stores.

So what is it about these two apartment buildings that makes them so different? Is it the marble flooring in the entrance hall of the expensive apartment building, versus concrete flooring and bars on the glass to stop people smashing it in the other? Or is it the nice mirror in the nice lift versus the polished aluminium in the other lift as the people can't be trusted not to smash a mirror? Ok, so one is more aesthetically (*in a tasteful way*) pleasing, because more time, more skill, and more money has gone into it; but there is something much more fundamental, which is not at all obvious to the naked eye (although some of the results of it are), and that is that the buildings have different energies. Do you understand? Let me try to explain.

Rich vs. poor

If we say that everything in the world contains energy, it makes sense that, like the positive charge of a proton, there is a balancing negative charge of an electron. And if we believe that nature keeps everything in balance, humans must contain negative and positive energies, the same way as a building materials contain negative and positive energies. So perhaps that is why I feel so depressed around concrete. Perhaps it gives off negative energy. Whatever the case, there has to be more to the story than one group having more money than the other.

Let us try a quick experiment, where we switch both sets of tenants. What do you think would happen? They still have their same jobs (or lack of them), and they still have the same amount of education and money. What would happen to the buildings? What sort of "vibe" would we be getting from either building? Would it have changed, or would it be the same?

Let me ask you a different question: Do you think people have the ability to give off different energies? Do you think you can get a "positive vibe" or a "negative vibe" from someone? Wherever we go, we carry this vibration with us. Because it is us. We are vibrating!

Although the buildings have different energies, it is the people who give off the strongest energies.

Now let's imagine we swapped both tenants again, but this time, we swapped their lives as well. We now give the council tenants plenty of money and we send them off to their new shiny apartment building across the river. What do you think will happen? Will they still feel miserable? Will they still think their lives are terrible? Those who have addictions will still be addicted of course, and those with mental problems will still have them.

So what has money enabled them to do? Well, they'll definitely start buying things, and those who are addicted will buy more substances. Over time, the apartment building will start to look like their old one; there will be graffiti on the walls of the lift, there may be drug dealing in the stairwell, and shouting and violence coming from some apartments.

Meanwhile, what do you think is going on in the council apartment building? The tenants don't have money any more, and they don't have their old lives out on the town, but they still have something to bring – themselves. They will probably start to clean up the mess the other tenants have left. They will clean out the apartments and order them more. They will clean the graffiti off the walls, they will clean the gardens, and may even arrange to have the council paint the walls and plant some trees. Perhaps they will try to create something positive. What do you think?

Would it be as I predict? And if so, why? Do you think it is because the people are better educated, better

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

schooled in the way of society, have better manners, appreciate things more? Because if they don't have money, that can't be the motivating force. Or do you think it is a clear case that these are the "good" people and the council estate tenants are the "bad" people. Whatever it is, it is not about inherently good or bad, but people do create energy around them that is either negatively or positively charged, I am sure of it; although you must test this out for yourselves.

Let us explore this more deeply. When we are happy in ourselves, we create positive emotions; and when we are unhappy, we create negative emotions. Now the reason we may be able to feel happy is we have taken care of our primary needs. We have provided ourselves with food, shelter, and clothing and can sustain it thanks to having the means to pay for it all. If we have problems, we have time and space to work through them, and we also are able to create meaningful relationships.

Now, without wanting to judge (for that would be of no use to our discussion), when you provide Man with a home, you take away one of the primal responsibilities of being human, which is to provide shelter for himself and his family. If he does not have to provide it himself, and if he has no means of providing food and clothing because he has no money, he starts to lose self-esteem (*a feeling of pride in yourself*); and when that goes, he starts to take no interest in anything external. Soon he becomes reliant on handouts from other people, which is society, in the form of benefits paid from taxes raised.

Why should he look after anything? Why doesn't someone else do it? He becomes lazy and inward looking, thinking about himself, his problems and what a miserable life he has been given, "if only I could find a way out of it..." So he creates more and more negative emotions making it hard for the positive ones to shine through. But that's just my opinion!

Let the tower blocks fall

Pain, suffering and self-pity, that's what I see when I look at these great crumbling tower blocks, that are testament only to man's inability to understand himself; where Man becomes a slave to others in power, where he loses all identity and becomes a social security number – a problem that has to be looked after.

So what would happen if we demolished the tower blocks and put nothing in their place but green grass? The energy of the place would be restored to balance (not that I want to create more homeless people you understand).

And what if we let people who lived there, fend for themselves, without social security benefits? What would happen to them? Would they die? Would they turn to crime, or would the primary drive of the human being take over at last and drive them to provide shelter, food and clothing for themselves and their family?

These may be "human needs," but they are not "human rights," as we see day in day out in some places in asia and africa, where there is no social security, no tower blocks to fester in; just the need to find food and shelter – fast! Perhaps those who feel as though their negative energies are because of injustice in society where they have been forced to be "poor," should go and live for even one week on the streets of new delhi or somewhere similar. That may give their positive energies a wake up call!

The energy walk!

If you pay careful attention to yourself everywhere you walk in a city, you will notice that you can find different energies. Just test it out for yourself. A city is a great place to examine things because everything is so cramped. You just have to walk off one of the main roads filled with pollution, shouting, running, pushing, and anger, and laughter, and retreat to a park. Suddenly, you will notice the energy changing. You will notice the birds, the grass, the trees. Suddenly the human energies are overtaken by nature's, which are far more powerful. Sit a while, notice how you are feeling, notice that there is a distinct calm come over you.

Now hurry back to the main street, back to your office, back to your meeting, back to your car, the metro, the crowding, the smell; and you may start to think "What am I doing here every day!?"

And indeed, what are you doing there every day?

If we had such a thing as a city energy meter, we would see some pretty nasty things going on above it.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Humans have such power in their minds and bodies, they can't help letting some of it "leak" out. We may question whether it is really contained at all!

But as we don't have a c.e.m, we will have to use our own intuition as we travel the concrete streets, as we question the nature of the city, its construction and "design," and how it relates to us, and the universe as a whole. We must ask ourselves how we came to exist in such a barren land, a land filled with misery and power, of control, and desire, of longing and becoming. All for what? Money and status?

We must question how far from nature we have come as we cross into the patisserie to get our cappuccino and cake, smelling of corporate scent. We must question our choices, our parent's choices, and how, if ever, you are going to be able to leave this all behind. Oh, and leave it behind you will, but I thought it would be better to try to leave it before you die!

The family is broken. Long live the city.

Cities have always been the power base of the area or the country; the place where deals were done, where schemes were plotted, and money changed hands. People were attracted like magnets to these places of dreams. They packed up and left their communities to find work, some left their wife and family behind, and they would return as often as they could, or send money.

But this wasn't how it was supposed to be. We were weaned on small tribes of cooperating hunters, where the society was everyone in the tribe; now "society" meant the fashionable elite. And unless you were powerful and rich, you couldn't become part of the "society." So you did what you could to earn some money and pay for your lodgings, but lots soon found out that swapping their rural family lifestyles for money wasn't all it was cracked up to be.

Divisions quickly arose in society between the rich and the poor, and they were segregated as much as possible, after all, the rich shouldn't have to see beggars and the poor on their streets, should they? These low lives were intolerable, although they did do the work that the wealthy didn't want to do, so they were tolerated.

Fast forward a few hundred years and the story is the same. The rich and powerful control the city and the money, and the rest just do the jobs the rich don't want to do. Is that a bit unfair? Ok, so a new class was created. The middle class, also known as the bourgeoisie, comprising traders and merchants, the general business lot! But the city was still controlled by the elite.

Fast forward to today, and still nothing has changed, except the middle class may have become a bit wealthier and so have the lower classes, but the gap between lower and upper class is now even greater. And now people crave the status and the money even more, so they travel from all over the country to get to the main cities.

Train and car journeys of greater than two hours each way are considered the norm. People get up at 5.30 am and get home after 7.00 pm. So what's happened to the family? Well, not only does dad want to earn more money and get a better position, but now mum does too, thanks to all the campaigning about equal rights for women!

Let's put this in perspective. The traditional village model would see the husband and wife working together on their farm, or close by, and bringing up the children together – you know, like a family? Now mum and dad both leave the house early, so they need someone else to look after the kids! Can you see how ridiculous this has all become? We left our stable family homes in our small communities in search of great wealth, and most of us only found mediocrity, stress and longer hours.

This is the time of the individual, not of the family group, brought about by idiotic politicians and greedy businessmen. Now we have single parents who try their best to bring up the children whilst holding down a job, complaining they can't afford day care. We have people in the council tower blocks complaining that their benefits aren't enough to cover food for their kids. The pollution is getting worse, the tension in the cities has become intolerable, people are drinking too much, taking too many drugs, and raising the blood pressure of the whole city to bursting point. All for what?

The world has gone completely mad

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Ok, the whole world isn't mad, but most of us are! We have created this stress ourselves. This is not caused by others. We want the money, we want the lifestyle, we want the status, we want the consumer goods, and big cities provide all of that, at a cost. Your sanity! Do you see what I am trying to say here?

If we think back to our quaint ideological village, where people are engaged in creating a community to live in, where children can grow up understanding nature and seeing mum and dad all the time, rather than one of them for a couple of hours a day, being looked after by complete strangers, and then when they're old enough sent away to school. Can you see what has happened? This isn't progress, it's disaster! All so we can buy more stuff, and show off to everyone how wealthy we are, and how cool we are.

But the quaint village isn't an ideological dream, nor is it something we can force people to live in. I am talking about a working community that makes money for the community, and people work there because they want to be part of the community, do you see? This is not a place for people who live in a small village, but work in the city to pay for the pleasure of having a large house and garden.

We are a basic animal at heart; we have simple needs (although our new brain likes to make them complex), but we keep burdening ourselves, making life harder and harder by creating fantastic new technologies (like mobile phones), which eventually enslave all who use them, and create addiction. Don't believe me? Then just take a walk down any city street and you will see people with weird cyborgesque headsets sticking out of their ears, their eyes glued to some magical screen.

Don't tell me we need all this stuff. Happiness is much easier than that. By creating and fostering relationships with our fellow Man, we can have a much more rewarding (and fun) time than chasing all the money and status in the world.

Cities were built by the powerful for the powerful; they are not for the likes of us who see a way out of this misery we have created. We should leave the powerful to their empty cities and watch them crumble as there will not be any servants to maintain them. We will have created much more than they could ever hope. We will have created a life that matters; a life built on relationships, where we all join in with bringing up the children, where we spend time with each other; where we learn about ourselves and each other. Where we learn to go deeper than anyone has before.

This is not simple village life with village idiots. This is a real community; that is what we are missing. "But what about the arts and the theatre?" I hear you cry. And yes, many people say it is the one thing the city has, that is truly great. The arts! Music! Film! Ballet! Opera! Museums!

Well, if you like this stuff so much, you can create it, or hope that when the cities finally explode and return to dust, that your favourite theatre and opera house is still standing, you know, the one you have visited once in your life? A real favourite.

The balance of the negative energy

How do you think the council tower block dwellers would get on in a real community, where people took responsibility for themselves, their families and each other, where government assistance was a thing of the past, where they enjoyed being creative, growing their own food, and trading with other communities? They would feel just fine. And what about all their negative emotions and activities, would they fall away?

People who think will always have problems of some kind or another, but when you live in a community where they are here for you and you for them, then something fantastic happens. What is that something? You will have to create your own community and find out!

Can you imagine your city being returned to nature, where you lived in balance with the earth, and it with you? I bet you can't! You'd have to give up too much. But when you're ready you let me know. And to the politicians: Don't worry, I'm not going to blow up the city. Like a good casserole, give it a bit more time in the oven and it will be ready itself!

We owe it to ourselves and to every other creature on this planet to become aware of our natural state; not wrapped in animal hide and living in caves, but alive, vibrant, bursting with positive energy, in complete awareness of self. Ready to explore the world! Or you could just keep catching the 6.42 am to London every day. For the rest of your life... An idealists dream? Hardly.

[Back to Index](#)

Commitment

1. *The trait of sincere and steadfast fixity of purpose*
2. *The act of binding yourself (intellectually or emotionally) to a course of action*

When I first met my wife, eight years ago, she told me what brave ideas I had, and how she was impressed with all the things I wanted to do; like drive through south america for charity (of course, it never happened). But she quickly realised something about me which most people had found out a long time ago, and that was that I was full of hot air (*loud and confused and empty talk*). A real talker; but that's all it was, talk.

Maybe I believed I would do all these great things, but maybe it was just a way to impress people. Either way, nothing ever got done. Lots of talk and no action was the story of my life. Why couldn't I just stick to one thing I planned to do, or should I say, the one difficult thing I planned to do? I always did the easy stuff, but when it came down to it, I always just let the difficult stuff go. It didn't matter; next week I would get another great idea I could impress myself and everyone else with.

Broken promises

Several years ago, while I was living in australia, I signed up for a charity that helped disadvantaged children (young people that were having a terrible time at home) amongst other people. The project I signed up for was called a breakfast club, where we would serve them breakfast in a hall, and play games for half an hour before they went to school.

It sounded just like the sort of thing I wanted to get involved in, so I agreed that yes, I would be there at 7.00 am every thursday morning to help set up the breakfast. I was quite excited about the whole thing; here I was, finally committed to something worthwhile – it was going to be great, I decided. The only problem was, I decided to go out and get drunk the night before.

Needless to say, I rolled in about 5.00 am, and was in no fit state to go into a children's breakfast club; so I slept until 12.00 pm. When I woke, I felt guilty about letting them down, as I hadn't even phoned them in the morning to say I wasn't coming in. It wouldn't have sounded good even if I had...

"Shorrry...Cann't may-kit in, I'm prrrriitty siick" or something like that. Anyway to cut a long story short I never called them again, and didn't answer the phone when they rang. Soon they stopped ringing and I was pleased. I was embarrassed by my behaviour, and I hoped I wouldn't ever bump into the woman I had promised I would help. Broken promises; it was the story of my life.

"Mum, I promise I'll pay you back."

"Dad, I promise I'll be there this evening."

"I promise I'll stop smoking."

"I promise I'll stop drinking."

"I promise I'll get a job."

Broken promises, that's all that ever seemed to come out of my mouth. But why did I make promises I didn't keep? Why not keep my mouth shut, and not promise anybody anything?

Maybe because deep down, I wanted to do better, and thought if I actually made a formal commitment, I would stick to it.

How many of you have ever been in the same situation? Where you wanted to do something better for yourself or your family or others but just couldn't stick to it when the time came... "I promise I won't go the races and gamble on saturday. I promise," and come saturday, go anyway?

On several occasions, I have planned a "cleansing fast" where I wouldn't eat for three or more days; I am completely committed to it, but as the time approaches, I become more and more anxious, and when the day to start comes, say "Oh, maybe next time," or start it in the morning and then give in by lunchtime! I was stuck in a continual cycle of making a promise to myself or to others, being committed to it right up to the day before, then deciding not to do it.

What makes us behave like that? Why can't we stay committed when we have made a promise? Perhaps promises are not worth the words or the paper they are written on. Perhaps making promises just makes us feel better about ourselves; what we could do if we really put our minds to it. If we come through on the promise, all well and good, and if we don't, no problem, it was all imaginary anyway; it was just ideas projected into the future.

Maybe the promise we should be making ourselves is to stop making promises, even if we do plan to

keep them; because they don't exist when we make them, only when we fulfil them. How many people have heard "But you promised..." I certainly have, a thousand times; and although I felt guilty, I knew that a promise was just talk, nothing more.

So I gave up making promises to people. I figured it was better not to promise something I might not fulfil, and I gave up making promises to myself, just in case I couldn't keep them! From now on, I thought, "If I am going to do something for myself or others I will do it, and if I decide not to, then I won't be letting anyone down because I haven't committed myself anyway!"

It was a good plan and it worked for a year or so, but then I realised I had just invented a way to justify not committing myself, and come up with a way to always be able to "hedge my bets" just in case.

Keeping your options open

I realised that the reason I could never commit was because I always kept my options open just in case a better offer came along – just as I did when volunteering for the breakfast club. I was going, then the pub came along. It was easier and required no thinking about so I chose it. It was a better offer. I spoke to my father about this.

"You've always been like that, since you were a small boy," he said.

"Really?"

"Oh yes, you'd be going to someone's house to play and have tea, then another friend would ring and you would say I want to go to his house now," he replied.

"Really?" I said, perplexed that this lack of commitment was evident from the age of five! "How could it be that I have always been like it dad? You must have done something to me when I was little that made me unable to commit," I said angrily.

"Oh yes, keep blaming your parents, it's always the parents fault..." he snapped.

"But it must be. I can't see how else it happened."

"Listen alan, I don't know either, all I know is that you always let someone down, including yourself!" he concluded.

Wow. That was harsh! My own father telling me that for the past 38 years I've never had any commitment to anything I ever did. So I racked my brains to find a solution but none was forthcoming. I searched through my past to find an answer but all I could find was that I must be scared of commitment. Sure, I would happily sign up because the commitment was for a future time, but when the time came I ran. I came to the conclusion that I was definitely scared of commitment! For those of you who aren't scared of commitment, let me tell you about keeping your options open.

Keeping your options open is always making sure you have a backup plan in case the one you are on isn't working out. It's like talking to the blonde in the bar, but making sure that the brunette at the next table knows you are available! Always have a backup plan. I always have. So when my marriage didn't work out, I knew I had other options, because I had planned it that way. When my job wasn't working out I left without a word, because I had a backup plan. This got me thinking. "If I always have a backup plan (even subconsciously) perhaps this means I am never living in the moment, for the moment; I am always planning a getaway. I am always somewhere else."

So just like eyeing up the brunette in case the blonde decides not to come home with you, I am focussed elsewhere. I am never present. I plan a three day fast but I am also planning what I will say when people ask me how it's going...

"Oh, yeah the fast, Nah. It wasn't really for me. Some people might like it, but I don't really..."

Blah, blah, blah.

So alongside the commitment (which is the plan) there is always a backup plan. There is always an out; all I have to do is take it.

Moment

1. At this time

So, I now knew what the problem was. It was chatting up the blonde, whilst keeping the brunette interested without the blonde knowing; and this I decided, could be applied to my whole life! Simple. So instead of just enjoying myself with the blonde no matter what happened, I was determined to have it all. I wanted to have the maximum fun I could, no matter who it ended up hurting.

So I planned to go to the children's breakfast charity, but I also wanted to go to the pub, even if it meant letting someone down. If only I had been brave enough to phone the charity and tell them "Sorry I was at the pub last night, and I couldn't get up," it might have been different, but as it was, I just left them in the dark; like the blonde who doesn't know your eyeing up the brunette! Ok, I think that's enough about the blondes and brunettes. Where were we?

So how could I get over this keeping my options open? How could I make a commitment and stick to it? First of all, I had to look at why I was making the commitment in the first place. Was it really something I wanted to do, or was I merely trying to fool myself and everyone else into thinking I was someone I wasn't?

I decided I was living in the future. I was living with the idea that I would be someone who did fasting or worked for charities, but in the present moment, I was someone else. So although I thought I was keeping my options open, what was really happening was I was deciding on what my future self would do! Do you understand? For example: "Last year I promised myself that next year I would stop smoking, but I plan to do it the year after instead!" It's all just talk. The action is now. That is the only time that things can exist in reality.

Promises and commitments are about a future time, which gives us plenty of time to change our minds, doesn't it? So I decided that the only time to commit (*engage in or perform*) is now. If I wanted to do something I would do it now, not in the future. And I started writing this book; a book that had been in my mind for some time. And where I had told people I was "going to write a book" which would probably have never happened, I could now say "I am writing a book," being in the present tense, which is now.

That changed me.

I realised how stupid I had been; keeping my options open, committing for the future, having backup plans to escape. That wasn't living, that was constantly planning in case whatever it was I was engaged in now didn't please me anymore. I had to commit to living now, in the moment, and enjoying every micro-second I was alive; and when I was talking to someone, I would commit to listening to them, not thinking about what I could be doing instead, or what to do later.

If I was with the blonde at the bar (there I go again!) I would focus on the blonde; I would give her my time because that was what I committed to do when I sat down, not looking around for something better.

I realised in a flash that my whole life had always been about looking for something else; something more than I already had. I had a beautiful wife, but I always dreamed of finding someone better looking, or with a better personality; someone more fun, someone more sexy. Do you understand? Instead of being content with my choices, I kept making more choices, or at least, was planning to make more choices.

So, commitment, as I understand it, is living in the present, which is now, now, now, and giving your all to whatever it is you are engaged in. Whilst you sit at your office desk, engage in what you are doing, rather than dreaming about where you would prefer to be right now. If you want to be somewhere else, "be there," but don't just keep talking about it as I did. If you want to leave your job, commit to leaving your job, not in a year, but now. Do you see?

All action can only be carried out in the present moment. Any time we project into the future, whether it be five minutes or five years, we give our tricky minds plenty of time to give us other options. There is only one time to be committed and that is the present, any other time is just pure fantasy.

When you decide to do something, do it NOW.

[Back to Index](#)

Community

1. *A group of people living in a particular local area*
2. *A group of people having ethnic or cultural or religious characteristics in common*
3. *Common ownership*

In this book you have all heard me talk about this so called “community,” but in this topic, I would like to explore it in detail with you, to find out what a community really is. Unfortunately, some people use the word in the wrong sense, I think. They talk about belonging to a religious, spiritual, hippie, or alternative community, amongst other types. We see communities as being something distinctive, something separate from the rest of society. For example: “He dropped out of society to go and live in an alternative community.”

But as we will see when we explore this topic more deeply, you can never really “drop out” of society. After all what is society? It is merely you and I in relationship. So although we may not want to be part of mainstream society, we can never truly leave it, because society is all around us; although people would like to think it has something to do with being in a particular social group. That definition just seeks to divide us more.

Society

1. *An extended social group having a distinctive cultural and economic organization*
2. *A formal association of people with similar interests*
3. *The state of being with someone*
4. *The fashionable elite*

At every turn, we try to divide ourselves more; not only from each other, but from ourselves. We fail to recognise that the world we live in, *is* “society.” We may speak different languages, have different religions, do different jobs, but we are all still in relationship with each other. There is no escaping it.

Whatever I do has an affect on another, sometimes positive, sometimes negative; but there is always an effect, a consequence of every action. In reverse, whatever other people are doing is having an effect on you. Do you see? So although you and twenty friends have decided to drop out of society by going and living on a deserted island, you are still in the society. Just because you have chosen to give up the “evils” of the western consumer lifestyle, you are still in relationship with it. There is no escaping it.

Society is all around us. The trees, and the foxes, and the rivers, and the oceans, are all part of the society, because we interact with them. The only way you can escape, is to leave the planet; only then, you would be in relationship with a new society, that of the stars. Whatever you did would have an effect on them and vice versa. No escaping. Ok?

So before you decide to escape society and run off to the woods and start a new community, away from modern society, remember what we just said. You cannot escape. And with that out of the way maybe we can continue...

Let's run away!

It's easy to start thinking about leaving the life you have created for yourself and heading off into the wilderness. I can see why people want to do it. I have often thought about it myself.

“I'm sick of this lifestyle, I hate it, I hate what it is doing to the planet, the people and to me! Maybe if I just go away into a forest and create a little camp for myself. I can live off the land, and really get back to nature. I feel alienated in this society, I don't belong here”

And then I realise, that whilst I am away hugging trees and meditating on the nature of all things, more weapons have been built, more retail parks have been built, war is still raging (internally and externally), we are still draining the oil from the earth; so everything is still the same.

Running away to a forest is the psychological equivalent of burying your head in the sand (*a reference to the popular notion that the ostrich hides from danger by burying its head in the sand*). You can hope and pray for peace, and that everything will be all right, but it won't! Do you understand? There is no point in running away to a monastery and engaging yourself in prayer to god every day, asking that peace be brought

to earth, and that Man wakes up to the trouble he is causing; that is a purely selfish approach to a real problem. All we are doing is saying “Hey, I can’t cope here. I don’t like it. You lot are “bad” people, so I’m off; see you in the next life!” That’s not a very grown up way of dealing with problems is it?

But it seems that many people think it is not only a good solution, but the only solution. Unfortunately, whilst you’re away on your mountain, praying for peace, and peace of mind, another child has been blown up by a land mine in some far away country, whose name no one remembers.

Running away to an island, a mountain, or to the forest, just isn’t going to solve the problems that Man is causing. Man caused them, and you are a part of the problem (being human that is), but you are also part of the solution! Because if you are feeling so discontented about the whole thing; so upset at the pain and chaos that man is causing for himself and his brother; then you are in the perfect place (psychologically) to do something about it. Do you see?

You are one person in many tens of thousands that thinks this can’t go on. This is not how life should be. But instead of staying to show the way, you decide to hit the highway!

Running away just means there is one less person with the awareness to show people a way out of the darkness. So to all those people who want to run away and start their own communities, fenced away from society (which you remember you can never escape) realise this: There is no such thing as an ideal world. And anyway, ideal sounds kind of like “idea,” which as we know, is created by thought, which is the cause of most of Man’s misery!

So before you get any “ideas” about what a perfect community should look like, and how you should interact with each other, and what you should do, and what you should all wear, and what you should talk about; remember that there is no running away from yourself, because you are society. All you are doing by creating another community is causing more division, and we certainly don’t need that!

Here I am

So now you’ve decided to stay, we can make some progress. Here you are living in society, disgruntled about the cities, and how so many people live so closely together, and what they do for a living, and you have decided you want to do something about it. What do you do?

“The first thing people should do is pack up and leave for the country...” you say.

Sorry, that isn’t an option, how are we going to move nine million people to the country? Even I would find it difficult to figure out how to house, clothe and feed that many people (actually, I would find it difficult trying to feed, clothe and house fifty!).

So no running away. We have to stay for now. We can’t just leave. We have nowhere to go. We helped create this mess and we are going to stay and help create something new. Oh, and you can stop your moaning about wanting to go and live by the sea in a little beach hut, with only you and the wind for company. That, as we say, is idealism, although it would be nice!

You’re here, and you say you are unhappy with the state of the world, undertake a massive shift in your thinking, create awareness of self, and are ready to go to work. Where do you begin? Let’s take this slowly shall we?

You live at number 23b lower west street, some city, the world. You are in an apartment building with six other apartments, and you live in a terrace of some fifty or so houses – most converted to apartments; so if we do some simple maths, we could say that in your street, there are between three hundred and six hundred people, depending on how many people live in each apartment, I might be a bit off with my calculations, but it’s a good place to start.

How many people do you know in the street? Well, go on, have a guess! Two hundred and fifty? Two hundred and eighty? How about two? or maybe none?

That’s not a very good community, is it? How are we going to build our new community if you don’t know anyone? Hmm, we’ll have to go back to the drawing board, because as we saw in the topic “friendship,” the chances of you talking to strangers are between zero and one percent (unless you’re my mum that is!). No, there must be another way of creating our community which doesn’t involve talking to other people (sorry I’m being facetious).

Let's begin again shall we? We are saying that in our small street there are perhaps 500 people, and we don't know any of them well. We do not know what they do for a job, what religion they are, what their personalities are like, and we certainly don't know if they are interesting in helping us solve some serious problems in the world. For all you know, they may be creating many of them, and would send you on your way with a resounding "piss off," if you try to convert them to your idea of community.

Remember, we live in a society that the powerful have designated "community free," whatever the posters may tell you. This is the age of the individual. Governments don't want people to group together in their own "communities," they want everyone to act individually whilst they decide what a community is.

And that's it, isn't it? Somehow, we have allowed the governments and the councils to break up our communities with the only reward being gratification, in the form of money and possessions. They don't want us to think as a whole (a community), they want us divided, as it makes us easier to control.

Sure, they may set up a "community" hall, where the "community" can gather, but who really goes there?

We are too happy with our individual lives, our families, our jobs, and our friends; why would we mix with people we don't know? What would be the point of it? Everything we need socially and financially, has already been "provided" by the state. So although we may hire the hall for weddings, birthday parties, and discos for teenagers to keep them off the streets, a hall isn't really what I would call a community, whatever the government tells us.

We are individuals living in the "wider community" as the politicians would like to call it. But it is purely an organisational method of control, and has nothing whatsoever in common with the communities that used to exist when there weren't quite so many of us squashed up together in cities. But it's not just cities that are the problem, even rural communities are only communities in name; they are just individuals who happen to be living in the same post code area, just as the people in the cities are.

I think we have got ourselves in a real quandary here. We say we are ready to help create real communities, but find we are going to have to start from the beginning again as there is no such thing as a community left. "But I am only one individual, what can I do; how can I change the system?" you plead. But you don't have to change the system, you are part of the system, and by changing yourself, you are already starting to create something new. The only problem is everyone else! And that's where we are going to have to be careful. Because attempting to change everyone else is the result of idealism, which is thought, and that can't help us! So where do we start?

Letting go of the word "community"

We have said that we are under the control of the politicians, and the government, and that these days, community is a mere geographical location, not a state of mind; and that is where we have to explore this more deeply and very carefully. Let us leave the idea that a community is something we live in behind. Let us leave the idea that a community is something that the government tells us it is, behind. Let us once and for all agree that a community hall, or talking with people you know, or having community barbecues or meetings isn't a community; and let us try to explore the concept that community is not even something physical, but a state of mind you carry with you at all times. Let me explain.

I have told you that I spent some time last year in a buddhist community on an island off the west coast of Scotland. It was a wonderful place; the island was only one and a half miles long by half a mile wide, and the peak of the island rose majestically out of the sea for several hundred metres. Oh, how I enjoyed walking to the top and sitting alone with my thoughts looking out over the ocean; it was so calm and peaceful, as I watched the wild ponies and the wild sheep sauntering around. It was just like paradise.

At the centre, there were only fifteen people permanently living there, but we had up to sixty guests a week who came on "spiritual" courses. I was one of the chefs there for several months, and coming from the area of society we would call "individual," I found it hard to fit into a small community where everyone knew everyone, and what they were doing; but this changed.

I started to realise that not only were we not doing this for money, but we were doing it for the wider community, and for each other. Although we lived in separate rooms, we shared a common space where we laughed and joked, argued over the nature of reality, and many other topics. I actually started to enjoy

myself! Here were strangers sharing their deepest thoughts with me; their hopes and their fears; and I was sharing with them. In short we were helping each other. But I couldn't work out why.

"Why are we here helping each other?" I used to think. "Why is it nice to sit by the fire and talk about life with people I barely know?" "Why is it so nice to finish work and go for a run with one of the monks, and after my shower, sit down in the library, and talk to people about whatever comes into my mind?"

Although the island was set up as a project, the interactions we had were in no way forced, they were very real. The point was to share the work that needed to be done, and share in that experience with each other. Nothing more.

"There must be a point to all this" I thought; "there must be a bigger reason why we are all here," but there wasn't, we just were. We were in relationship with each other, for the benefit of each other. What a strange idea, I thought.

And indeed, it was unlike any other experience I have ever had. But I soon knew I couldn't stay on this wonderful island; I had to get back to where the people had not discovered contentment in sharing. I had to leave.

As I got on to the boat and waved my friends goodbye, I realised I didn't have to leave the island behind, although I was physically moving away from it. I could take it with me in my mind. I could take the sharing, and the discussions and the joy and the sadness, and use it to create a life for myself that was not divided. I would take away a new mind from the island. A community mind. And I didn't need to run away to an island to use it. I could use it anywhere in the world!

The community mind

Let's face it, none of us like sharing very much. It's not our fault, we have been conditioned to think like that by our parents, our teachers and our governments. I'm sure you've all heard the old saying "What's mine is mine, what's yours is yours," and that pretty much sums up the modern world in which we live.

We live an individual existence. Friends, lovers, jobs come and go, but at the end of the day there is still "me." My house, my possessions, my money, my needs, my desires.

We love being individuals; it makes us happy. We have no one to answer to; we can do whatever we like (as long as we don't break the law). We go on holiday, we go on courses, we learn more – all to benefit ourselves. "Community, that's so old school, the future is me!" So we carry on living our lives hoping never have to do anything for anyone else.

Maybe when we start a family, or get older, we might like to help out in the parents group or try running a stall at the school fete. We may even do some charity work for the local hospice; but at the end of the day, we come running back to "me." Do you understand? All of our so called "community" actions are external, but the "me" still exists. We want to give to make ourselves feel a little less greedy, but how much can we give? One percent? Three percent?

Some of us like to show we care, by donating money to local charities, and we might drop a pound or two in the box outside the supermarket where we have just spent eighty five pounds. We will help, and we will share, but only if the cost isn't too high; and I'm not just talking about money.

We will help as long as it doesn't eat into our "me" time too much; but this isn't just about donating time and money to charity, this is about living in communion (*sharing thoughts and feelings*) with everyone; this is about opening up new relationships with everyone you meet (don't worry there will still be plenty of me time). This is about developing a state of mind that says "Although I must look after my physical needs, if I give myself over to the community mind, my needs will be taken care of." Do you see?

We are so scared to let go of our individual lives just in case this community thing doesn't work out, when you decide, after all, that sharing everything with everyone just isn't for you! But why isn't it for you? Why do we hold onto our possessions so tightly; these dead items that alongside us will eventually turn back to dust? First of all we have to start to change the way we think about what "my things" are.

Of course, they're things you paid money for, or have been given, but it is only your mind that is clinging to them. I realised sometime ago that it didn't matter if I didn't have a lot of stuff anymore; I will die, they can't come with me (remember there is no inter-dimensional shipping service), so I just gave them away. If I really "need" an item later I will create the means to get it.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Maybe we should consider sharing to be like a library service. Some of us only want our own copies, because they are “mine,” but the book is available to all who want to read it. You borrow it, and you give it back so someone else can share it. So what if you don’t have a large reading library in your home, you only have it to impress people with! If you really want to read a book, you can get it from the library. So with that concept of sharing firmly in your mind, let us move on.

The library idea is a simple one. One person buys the book, and many people can share it for no cost. We could even buy books ourselves and give them away to people we don’t know (but they might think they’re contaminated or dirty, you know what people are like!) But sharing life is so much more than sharing books, it is about sharing time, space, (the physical and the not so) food, laughter, tears, wealth, poverty.

We must share everything, as everything is in us, and we are in everything. Do you understand? We may think things are *ours*, but even the beautiful, and the exquisite, eventually turns to dust in our hands (if we waited around long enough). So whose is it?

The beautiful table you had hand carved, eventually returns to the earth from whence it came, and try as you might, there isn’t a damn thing you can do to stop it. And the same goes for every possession. In the end they are not only worthless, they are nothing but dust.

So can you see how limiting this idea of the individual is? My stuff, my needs, my holidays, my pay cheque, my family, my beautiful home, will all become nothing, and so will I. To say they are nothing isn’t strictly true; they will transform, we should perhaps say. But as tangible items, they will be no more. No more ideas, no more grasping, no more becoming, no more greed. With our minds buried with our bodies, these too will die.

So I ask you now: How important is the individual in the world or the universe? A little, very, or not at all? How important are the politicians who make the rules we must conform to? How important is my boss who tells me off for being late, or for making a mistake? How important is the court that decides when I should see my children after divorce? How important are any of the powerful – who would seek to control us through their laws and their dogma? Not even a little.

All these men will return to dust, the same as our possessions will, and we should all start remembering that the next time they come knocking on our door looking for re-election.

The idea of a community the government has, is people enrolled in a “neighbourhood watch” scheme to watch out our windows, in case anyone is seen lurking about at night; or reporting each other to the police if someone steps out of line. In the eyes of the government, community = control – nothing more. But they put out their media campaigns of happy smiling citizens all working for the benefit of the “community.” But it’s not our community people are working for, it’s theirs.

Making the shift

I think we have come far enough along in our discussion to start introducing something new. We have said that a real community is a place in your mind where you naturally want to help each other and share, and that community, as described by the government, is merely a convenient way to geographically organise the population. Which one would you vote for?

The individual mind wants everyone else as far away from him or her as possible unless they are “colleagues” or “family,” and is constantly seeking more material wealth and individual happiness. But the community mind wants to create something for all, and wants to share life with everyone – not just people he knows.

“But how do we get from the individual mind to the community mind, given that most of us live in large urban areas where we have to go out to work every day to pay the bills? Although we would like to share in this vision, we actually don’t have the time or money to do it.”

And it is a valid point when you are still thinking as an individual, not as the whole; the indivisible, which is society. But I understand your question.

The question is: How do I shift from creating an individual life for me and my family, and shift to a new way of thinking without suffering? The answer is: When you shift your mind, you will already know!

Remember, when you think like an individual, you act like an individual, and when you think like a

community, you act like a community. Does that make it any clearer for you? I hope so, as we still have much to discuss.

The mind that resists change

Many people have touted around ideas of the “community” owning the energy companies, and the banks etc. but it must be remembered that the “community” *does* own the energy companies and the banks etc. They are just not run by the people we would choose to run them! But I know what people are talking about. They are saying that these “essential” services should be taken out of the hands of governments and profiteers, and put firmly back in the hands of the people, which is a thoroughly noble idea; but who would run these businesses? How would they get paid? After all, these huge organisations cost a lot to run. The people would still have to be billed.

“Ah, but hang on,” says one of you, “we would only charge enough to cover our costs.”

“But you have to make a profit of some kind so you can reinvest it, or need to upgrade equipment” argues another.

“Yes but we wouldn’t be making a huge profit like those greedy capitalists now....”

And suddenly it all gets personal and everyone ends up fighting. Which is what seems to happen to most projects when they are entrusted into the hands of the community. Why? Because they are thinking with their individual minds, not their community minds.

So is it impossible to create such a world where people help each other, where stimulation and interaction occur with assistance, barter, and sharing? Is the situation we have created now so entrenched in the society, that there is no way out? Must we must now follow the path that has been so carefully laid out for us by our governments and our parents?

Must we abandon all hopes for this community we speak of, and return to our individual desires? Perhaps. Perhaps we are not ready for this kind of revolutionary idea – one where people share their time and their knowledge, and their feelings with each other; where we are compassionate and loving to all things. One where people give assistance where it is needed without being asked; where greed is a thing of the past and everyone can live in harmony.

Ok, maybe I am being just a little idealistic; maybe the individual has overtaken the whole, and “me” time is just what we ordered. After all, haven’t we given enough over the years?

“For thousands of years, we have lived together in small communities, sharing the load, sharing responsibility, sharing love and sadness. That was yesterday wasn’t it? Today, we don’t have to think about anyone else. We are free! Free I tell you! Free to live life to the full without a thought or care for one other solitary being on the planet,” you cry. “I want a break from other people, I don’t want to have to see the same people day in day out, I want to be able to come home, shut the door, turn on the tv, open a bottle of wine and chill out after a hard day – not start thinking about someone else!”

“So we’re back to the old individual thinking, I thought we had got through that...”

“But perhaps we think individually, because *we are* individuals,” someone shouts from the back. “We’re not joined at the hip with everyone else. We have individual brains and we should use them individually!”

And no one is saying we have to stop thinking (although it may help for some people). What we are saying is that when we think, we should be thinking about how our actions are going to affect other people. We are connected with everyone else; we are in relationship with every living thing, do you remember?

When I do, so I affect others, and the same goes for everyone else. So let’s start thinking about this. We will start slowly and we will try to create this community mind together.

Let’s face it; things aren’t going to change overnight are they? You and I accept that, but change they will, one step at a time. What we are aiming to do is create a community mind web so complex that in the end there will be no control, and definitely no community halls, just society working in natural harmony with itself.

“Ha! Impossible!” you cry.

And that is exactly the kind of thinking that will make everything impossible!

So how do we fashion this web? Well, let us consider the spider that starts in the centre and keeps spinning and connecting all the points (not that we are trying to ensnare any prey!). There is no idea in it, just

a natural process, and that is what our community mind web will be like. Except there will be no one at the centre, and no one controlling how it is built. It is much like the internet, which is a loose connection of many computers all connected together, with no one computer in charge. But we *do* need a starting point. Any ideas? How could we make a small gesture that confirms our shift to the community mind?

Well, as most people don't like talking to strangers, and we definitely don't like sharing things for no reason, there has to be some focal point, much like the conversation corners I was suggesting setting up everywhere, so random strangers could meet, chat, and leave again, now no longer strangers.

Let's take the car, or the bicycle. In some cities there are bikes and cars available for community hire, and once you have signed up to the scheme you can just pick them up in the street. I am not sure how successful they are, but it is a good idea, only why would people want to rent a community car or bike if they have their own? Sounds a bit too much like the old "community hall" idea to me so forgive me if we ditch it as a starting point.

You and I know that community is something we cannot cause to exist externally, no matter how much we would like it to, after all, if we can force something to happen, it is much easier than everyone arriving at the community mind by way of a natural process. But we must resist the temptation. We must create the web without creating it, if you understand what I mean. We must (through our own change) cause something to be created, without it happening as the result of idea. But it seems that yet again we have hit a brick wall.

Creating the physical network

I don't know about you, but I am ready to share, to collaborate, and to create with others with no financial gain for myself. But this doesn't mean you can all turn up at my door and get free stuff! It kind of defeats the object of the game don't you think? And given that most people are not ready to assume the monks mind where he renounces attachment to the physical, and does everything for the benefit of others, we have to take this into consideration when we look at our starting point. Let me tell you a story.

Many years ago, my mother joined what was then known as the baby sitting network (or circle). You started off with no credit, and had to offer your services to baby-sit other peoples children to gain tokens that would allow you to call upon another member of the network to baby sit your children. So the more credits you gained (by giving your time to others), the more you could leave your own kids and go out for the night. Not quite the community mind we talked about but it's getting there, one ring (*the method of babysitting currency*) at a time. What a simple scheme, but I believe it is no longer in existence, because now people pay for babysitters or ask people for favours. But that's life I guess.

So there you have it. A scheme that has no one at the top and no one at the centre, but through a natural process benefits all that belong to it. Can you see how something like that could work for you and me? What could we offer to gain the magical credits?

"Yeah but we don't need a scheme like that now, we've got money."

But there again my friend, is the individual mind talking! Can you see how just picking one thing could offer, can change our thinking about how we live? Whether it be a buddhist community in scotland, or a city with a million people in europe? Just one thing, that's all we need to get started.

What will it be? Will it be your time? Your knowledge? Your skills? And remember, we are not offering them for free because that would be a one-sided relationship. We are offering ourselves for the benefit of others, but that does not mean we should not benefit ourselves in some way. Can you imagine how one-sided the baby sitting network would be if everyone just took? That one person always gave their time and no one else did? That is not relationship, that is purely selfish, and gives rise to division

So, have you come up with your offering? Has your community mind decided what you will give? But wait a minute, you live in a city; how will you contact people in your area without talking to them? After all, we still don't like talking to strangers do we?

There has to be some neutral space, somewhere people can get together that where we can offer our services. Somewhere we feel comfortable like a dedicated "community exchange network centre," not run by the local council, not staffed by the do-gooders from the local church, in fact not staffed at all, (remember no centre). Just a place where people can commune not to receive, but to give! Someone once said "Give and thou shalt receive," but I'm not sure who it was; someone famous I think!

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Perhaps we could attach it to our new “conversation corners,” the two are surely linked. Unfortunately, “community exchange network centre,” sounds like a government welfare centre, so we better come up with a new name. How about... Well, I’m not a genius in marketing. You think about it!

So where should we place these places of giving? “And how will we know that the people who offer to do things for us, are not criminals, or paedophiles, or murderers” say the more sceptical amongst you. But I offer you these words: “These are not just government exchange booths, but places where we *want* to do something different, where we recognise that we are in relationship with all others. Where you come to my home and I come to yours. Where I service your car and you cook for me, where I paint your lounge and you paint my portrait. And we all get rings. Fifty rings for a hair cut, twenty rings for mowing the lawn, five rings for a lasagne and side salad!”

No one is in control, we are just existing within the community mind; and how nice it will be to know that the person who is making your new table is in the circle, a circle uncontrolled by human hands, one that exists for its members, and because of its members. Not because we are all in the same postcode district but because we want to give to others. And if we want to give more than we take, we just don’t accept the “rings,” but they are there just in case you need them.

A new light is shining

Hopefully this will give you something to think about. I am not suggesting that the ring exchange is a perfect solution; I merely offer it to stimulate your own thinking. But hopefully, it will illuminate the idea that Man does not need to be told how to behave by his government and local councils. He does not need to be shown a building that says “this is your community centre,” he knows what community is. He does not need to run off and live in the forest and wait until everyone else changes. He can stay right where he is and create the community mind. It won’t be easy, but then nothing worthwhile ever is. Start creating and soon our web will cover the whole globe. That should annoy the politicians and the businessmen!

[Back to Index](#)

Competition

1. *An occasion on which a winner is selected from among two or more contestants*
2. *The act of competing as for profit or a prize*
3. *A business relation in which two parties compete to gain customers*

And the winner is... no one

The scientists will tell you that Man is naturally competitive; that throughout his existence he has competed for food, water, and someone to mate with. This may be true, but what also may be true is that Man has also learned to be cooperative with others. Competitive and cooperative. But we only cooperate when it is in our own interests to do so.

Private business is immensely competitive, with each business trying to outdo the other, by creating a better product, offering a better service, or even dropping the price. The end result of the competition we are told is a win-win situation for the consumer. Competition drives innovation, we are told. If there is no competition, then why would Man try to do it any better?

Unfortunately, this seems to ring true when we look at state owned businesses, and see stagnation of ideas; terrible service, huge waste, and elevated prices. With no competition, there is no incentive for them to do any better. As soon as the businesses are sold off to private enterprise, where the only goal is survival, companies will do anything to improve services etc. because their very existence depends on them satisfying more customers than their competitor. But that's not what our discussion is about today.

If we believe that Man is naturally competitive, and always will be, then we shouldn't worry too much. All of this competition is just like a modern game of survival of the fittest, but in the past, food was scarce, we had to hunt for it; now we just "hunt" for it down at the local supermarket.

Today's competition has taken a different turn. We compete to be the most powerful military country in the world, or just the richest country. Somehow, competition has taken on super proportions, and we are now competing against millions of others; not individually, but as a group, country against country. Within that group, the competition extends to multinational organisations, smaller companies, sole traders, and then Man against Man, the strongest, the fittest, the most intelligent, the fastest etc.

We have developed competition on so many layers, that it is impossible to find someone who isn't competing. Schoolchildren have to compete with others in everything from sports to who has the highest grade in an exam. We compete for the attentions of the opposite sex by buying the fanciest clothes, wearing the sexiest make-up, having the most up to date hair style.

Even charities which are supposed to exist solely for the purpose of helping people, are competing with other charities for government funding and donations. We can't escape from it. The whole world is competing. Songs compete with other songs in the popular chart; films compete with other films, scientists try to outdo one another with new discoveries; even some villagers compete in festivals for the person with the largest vegetables.

Competition has taken on a life of its own. Sometimes, we are not even consciously trying to compete with others, such as at award ceremonies, where someone puts our name forward as "best screen writer 2008," and then four others are put up against us, all competing for the same prize.

"And the winner is..."

Incredible isn't it? A competition we didn't even enter, and suddenly we are put under tremendous psychological pressure! We think "I hope it's me, I hope it's me, I hope it's me..."

"...and the winner is..." someone else.

So you graciously applaud them and smile; only underneath, you are bitterly disappointed.

What on earth is going on? What has happened to our societies? Why do we put each other under so much pressure just so we can be the "winner?" Whether at school, business or the arts, the pressure is the same; must win, must win, must win. Surely something has gone wrong at the very core of our civilisation, for that's what we are supposed to be, a civilisation (*a society in an advanced state of social development*).

Maybe trying to beat everyone is what civilisation is about, but I hardly think so. "Be the best you can be, alan," my mother used to say, but what that inevitably meant was trying to beat everyone else and come out "on top."

I started competing in running races as a young boy. I was never a "natural great," but I was pretty good, although when I entered the races with the "best" runners in school, I never stood a chance. All I needed was for them to not turn up, or to injure themselves along the way. On several occasions this happened, where two of the best boys in my year weren't taking part for some reason or other. Now I had a chance!

I ran my heart out, knowing if I could only pass these last three I could be the winner! I accelerated with

the last of my energy, my legs feeling like lead, and slowly but surely, I passed one boy, then another, then another. I crossed the finish tape. I was first! I was first! I looked around and saw everyone applauding me, my mother was there, applauding like mad, and she came running over.

“Well done, alan. Well done! You were first, you were great!”

And it is true, I did win.

“But only because the best runners in my year, who always win, weren’t there mum!”

“Don’t worry about that,” she said. “If they were here you’d have beaten them too.”

And maybe I would have, but the next race they were in, I came a dismal fourth. You see it doesn’t matter who’s competing and who’s not. It doesn’t matter if the best aren’t there – that’s their tough luck. If the competition is today and you don’t enter, who’s fault is that?

Imagine if the boys who were the best runners, had come up to one of the judges on that day and said “But we’re the best runners, we’re much better than alan, you should give us the medal,” what would he say?

“But you weren’t running today.”

As the saying goes, “you’ve got to be in it to win it!” No one cares about someone who says they’re the best; it’s all about the day. If you don’t compete you can’t win. And unfortunately, that seems to be what is happening in the world today.

At work, we must compete in order to prove to someone that we are the best baker, window cleaner, or truck driver. We need someone to pat us on the back and say “Yes, you’re the best.” And it all starts with the interview!

We compete with many others even to get to the interview, then we compete with the candidates at the first interview, then we compete with the candidates at the second interview, and finally we may be accepted or rejected. Competition is about getting the approval from your peers that “Yes! You *are* the best.”

There are always winners and losers

We all seek approval from our parents and teachers, and when we are the winners, we are applauded; but what happens when we are not the winners? We are scolded and told to “try harder!” What do you think this artificial competition does to the developing mind? To those who are successful, it affirms in their mind that they are better than everyone else; but to the loser, it is like their world has ended; their self-esteem drops through the floor and they feel genuinely miserable. What sort of society have we created that makes winners and losers out of wonderful human beings?

Competition for food was critical to our success as a species in the beginning, but this has nothing to do with food or biology, this is man-made. As long as you have enough food to eat you are not a loser. You can never be a loser, that is just a word invented by those who seek to separate us, but we are one. Winning and losing is a concept that has no place in a compassionate society. So what if you’re not the fastest runner? So what if you don’t get an “A” in maths? So what if you don’t become a managing director. Do you see? It doesn’t matter what you are, as long as you have love and compassion in your life.

Companies want us to compete with each other at school, and in interviews, because it means they can compete and be the winners; and governments want companies to compete so *they* can be the winning government. But all this winning and losing is just in people’s minds. People who are not satisfied with just being. People who want separation between rich and poor, intellectual and ill-educated; but true intelligence can never come from competition, it merely helps to suppress it.

And the winner is, no one

Can you imagine what would happen if we stopped competing? What if there was no competition in school or industry; or no competition for the best film of the year, or the best runner. What would happen? Would society as we know it collapse? Would this be the end of life as we know it? All I can say is “Yes, hopefully!” But out of it would come something new. Something we had never thought about before; or maybe we would just start wanting to compete again. All I know is, we must break through the prison that competition has trapped us in.

There is no point in me trying to offer some idealistic solution to the problem, because there is no problem, only us, and we are so stuck trying to win approval from everyone as to how great we are that no one would listen anyway.

“I want approval, because it makes my mind happy, so I do what society has told me will win me approval: I compete.”

I hope you are starting to see that this has nothing to do with our ancestral heritage. This has to do with the belief in the mind that if I compete and win then people will think a lot of me. I will be rich and I will be powerful. This has nothing to do with the betterment of the human race, quite the opposite in fact.

So what has competition done for the world as we know it? Has it made us more loving and tolerant towards each other, or helped us make the planet more sustainable for future generations? What has competition done for anyone, except making people a lot more stressed than they should be?

The reason we are so stressed is that when you compete, your body feels like it is in a race for survival; although passing exams, getting a better job or making more money is hardly survival. Nonetheless, your body does not know that, so it is constantly in a state of stress. If you don't believe me just go and ask anyone who works in a corporate environment or on a production line what stress is like. All for what? So we can make money.

Money talks, and so does power

Why else would we be in competition with each other? As we said before, this is not a race for survival; this is a race to see who can be bigger, and bolder, and richer than anyone else. And as I write this topic, I fail to see how any of us could get caught up in this illusion, but we do. We think competing is natural, so we continue, but that is because we are asleep. We are being manipulated by powerful people who desire that competition continues because it betters them. Can you not see it?

At school, you win the race because you were told to enter it by your teachers. At the job interview, you had to compete with others because that was the only way you could get the job, and ultimately the money to supply yourself with your basic needs! So your basic needs, like food, shelter and clothing *are only* attainable by competition. The scientists were right, Man is competitive, you see!

But we should have no need to compete. There should be plenty of what we need available on this earth, except those in power hold on to it greedily, and tell you that if you want it you are going to fight for it. You're going to have to compete at school and work to pay for it, and if you want any more than just the basics you're going to have to compete and pay for that too.

Water:	Controlled by the powerful
Food:	Controlled by the powerful
Shelter:	Controlled by the powerful
Clothing:	Controlled by the powerful

“Compete!” they cry, “it's good for you! It's good for progress, it's good for humanity, and it's good for the planet.” But we must know that none of that can be true. I agree that in times of dire need, we will physically compete with others for every scrap of food and water that is available, but that time is not upon us. We have heard that Man can be a cooperative animal, and it is time we started cooperating – not being controlled by the powerful, nor dictated to.

So let us examine cooperation vs. competition.

Many businesses have been set up as worker's cooperatives (*a jointly owned commercial enterprise (usually organized by farmers or consumers) that produces and distributes goods and services and is run for the benefit of its owners*), and have become successful, but unfortunately they are all still competing, because they want people to buy from them and not another cooperative or company. They are a good idea but no more than that. No, we must look more deeply if we want to get to the truth of this.

Gameplay

We all play games, don't we? But the outcome of the game always requires a winner. From card games to board games, there must be one person who is better than everyone else. So several months ago I tried to come up with a game that cannot ever have a winner, and wondered how I could possibly market it! I wanted to invent a game where finishing the game requires full cooperation between all players otherwise the game wouldn't finish. The only rule would be full cooperation between the players, and it must show that cooperation can be as enjoyable as competition.

Well, try as I might, I just couldn't see how this would work! I became more and more frustrated. I could see how I could create a game that required full cooperation in order for it to be finished, but playing games isn't about just completing the game; that goal, in the eyes of the players is easy – what they want, is to compete!

And that's when it became clear to me. Competition isn't essential, it is just that our minds and our bodies become excited when we are competing, just as they would be if we were hunting a lion, and our lives depended on killing it so we could have something to eat. I was bitterly disappointed.

Of course, the excitement was of winning, of beating the other players; how can it be exciting just to cooperate? In fact, the more I started to think, I realised that most people do not even understand what cooperation (*working together on a common goal or project*) is, instead, even in a game of cooperation, the me, the individual, the competitor, comes out every time, trying to offer ideas that are better than his co-players; in a sense trying to win, to beat them, or at the very least, to feel the excitement of competition.

I cannot say that cooperation is more exciting than competition. I can see why we love to compete, but our minds are so stuck in this thinking that the idea of a game with no winner seem incredible to us, and most people would say, a little stupid.

“Why would you bother playing at all, if there's no winner?”

The excitement of winning would seem central to human existence. From our hunting days when winning meant survival through to the modern day boardroom, where winning means more money, we happily compete.

Ok, I give up, you win

So, is that the end of our discussion? Is there no more to say? Do we just accept that there are winners and losers in all walks of life? Do we give up on cooperation, just because it doesn't make our heart beat faster and excite our mind, or do we continue trying to seek out a future when Man can at last see cooperation, and not competition, as the way?

Everything we seek is already here. Everything we desire to be we already are. Everything we need has already been provided. So what if cooperation means that we don't get to feel excited about beating another human being! Are we not of intelligent minds where we can see that this kind of activity is futile? I guess not! But when you see the truth of it, you will never want to win another game again, but be happy to just *play*, that is the joy of cooperation.

I cannot see another way out of all the trouble that Man has caused himself, his neighbour, and the planet as a whole. Nothing is good enough for us, the individual; we do not see ourselves as part of the whole. It is just me, my ambition, my success, my winning; just like in a game of cards. But it is up to us as parents to release our children from this never ending cycle, otherwise we will continue to try to beat each other at whatever cost; and we may find that soon we have nothing left to compete with.

All will be gone. We will have used up everything.

The trees, the minerals, and the oil will have gone, and we will be left thinking: “What if we had cooperated as a planet to create a sustainable world for every being, not just a world where a few people win for a short time?” But by then it will be too late. I am not trying to scare you into action, just to get you to wake up to yourselves. But then again, you may not want to wake up.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Cooperation is the whole. Competition is division
Which will you choose?

[Back to Index](#)

Complaining

- 1. Expressing pain or dissatisfaction of resentment*
- 2. Express complaints, discontent, displeasure, or unhappiness*

Have you ever noticed how much we complain as a species? We complain about everything in life. It's too hot, it's too cold, we don't have enough money, the tv is terrible, the food we ate was tasteless, we have to work too long, we don't have enough holidays, our husband or wife is annoying, our children are annoying, the grass needs cut, we don't have a garden, the house is too small, the car is too old... The list is endless, wouldn't you say? I used to be like that too; nothing was ever good enough for me, I just couldn't help myself. I had to complain about something. Then one day, out of the blue I realised...

I'm lucky to be alive

That changed me instantly. I was suddenly aware that I was being so selfish, complaining all the time. Not only do billions of people have it much worse than me here in my middle class life, but the fact that my father's sperm even fertilised my mother's egg was amazing.

That I survived nine treacherous months in the womb, where anything could have happened during the pregnancy (my mother previously had a miscarriage due to a car accident), survived the birth without getting the umbilical cord wrapped around my neck, survived infancy through to early childhood without contracting any diseases that could have put an end to my short life, is nothing short of miraculous! And amazingly, I survived adolescence without any accidents, right up to adulthood; and here I am, healthy, with my body and mind intact, aged 38, writing this. What have I got to complain about?

Now please think about this carefully, as it is important. Think about what you like to complain about, and then think of the people who have had limbs blown off by mines, are starving, have been abused; people who are being raped right now, who are being interrogated by the secret police as you read this, who cannot say what they want in public for fear of torture and imprisonment. Think about the people who cannot buy food, cannot grow food because there is no water, have no home, have mental illness, have medical problems that mean they may die soon. Would you like me to go on?

*Tell me your problems. Tell me what's wrong
Tell me what you really have to complain about*

The neighbours make too much noise. Their dog is always barking, their tv is too loud, they never mow their lawn, their children leave their toys outside, their car is too old, it lets down the appearance of the neighbourhood, their house needs painted, their trees are too high...

So what!

When you think what you complain about, it's pretty unimportant stuff really; although you attach great importance to it, wouldn't you say? The thing about complainers is that that's all they ever do, isn't it? You like to complain, but you aren't ready to do anything about it. Everything is a problem, but you can't come up with a solution, or at least you won't, because you are too busy talking about it!

If something is so much of a problem, no matter how trivial it may seem in the greater scheme of things, then you should deal with it! Find a solution, that's all you have to do. And remember this, if there's no solution, then there's no problem! Do you follow what I'm saying? If you can't come up with a solution to whatever it is you are complaining about, then let it go. You will feel so much better.

You see, complainers waste a lot of their positive energy in life being negative, because that is what complaining is – negative. If your neighbour's tv is always too loud, go over and speak to him about it.

Sometimes, if we want to fix something that is annoying us, we have to face up to the fact that we will have to be confrontational from time to time. That does not mean you have to get angry; it just means "deal with it." But most of us aren't like that, are we?

When we see our neighbour, we wave and say "Hi, how are you doing?" and have a really friendly chat with him; but as soon as you go inside, you turn to your wife and say "That stupid neighbour, and his stupid

loud tv, I'm really getting sick of it, I'm going to..." But you never do, do you? Because it is much safer complaining from a distance.

So let's forget all about this complaining, shall we? Let's spend our time on more constructive activities. It's time to appreciate what you have, and that is life. You could have lost out so many times during the course of your time here on earth. A wrong step in front of a car. Being in the wrong place at the wrong time, a terminal illness – but no, you are still here, and reading this book.

What use does complaining serve? You will never be able to change anything by just moaning about it and you will make yourself unhappy. Appreciate life and start living that life with a little bit of joy! What do you think? Can you do that? Or would you prefer to wallow in the sea of negativity you surround yourself with? It doesn't cost anything to stop complaining. You don't have to live in a democracy. You don't need to be rich. You don't need to be happy. You just need to be aware of why you are doing it.

Decide whether you want to find a solution to it, and if not, just let it go. It also costs nothing to let things go. Just let it go. Even if it's a "matter of principle," the negativity is bringing you down. Let it go.

Discontentment

1. A longing for something better than the present situation

My ex-wife used to say to me that I was always complaining, but I took great offence at that; I didn't complain about, what I would call, unimportant things. I didn't complain when she left all the washing up to be done all the time, or when her clothes were strewn all over the house, or when she left the house in a mess, I just tidied them up. It may seem odd to you, but once I was aware that there was no solution to the problem, I let it go, then there was no problem. Easy.

This was something different.

It started in the supermarkets, when I used to look at the country of origin and see that we were importing so many goods from asia that could easily have been grown locally (most things can be grown in the australian climate). Whether fresh, frozen, or tinned, it was all imported because it was obviously cheaper to make them there than locally, due to the low labour cost in asia. I was disgusted by this, and so complained bitterly to my wife about exploitation etc.

I then started to notice the mass consumerism in australia; their addiction to shopping and spending on luxury goods and entertainment. Then the volume of nationalism and conformity struck me. I didn't want to complain, but I just saw things that upset me, and I spoke openly about them.

This just annoyed everyone, including my wife and her friends, who said that if I didn't like australia, I should go back to england! But it wasn't that I didn't like the country. Having driven round australia, I knew it to be a place of great beauty and natural wonder; it was the society and their lack of awareness about how they were living that was getting to me.

In the end, I wondered if I was just a complainer, the type I mentioned in the beginning of this topic who complains about everything and is content with nothing; but then I had a flash of insight. This wasn't complaining in the general sense, this was real discontentment with how things were, and it didn't stop when I left australia last year, it only got worse.

I started to see how humans were behaving towards each other, their total lack of connection (when they pick up a consumer product) to the person who has worked so hard to make it for a few pounds salary (most consumer products are now made in "developing" (*a euphemism for cheap labour*) countries).

I became disgusted by our western attitude to everything. We wanted it. We had the money. We didn't care how it got there, the hardship that people had to endure to get it there, or the knock-on social and environmental consequences of having it. We just wanted it.

I watched children in toy shops crying to their parents that they wanted a toy (this month's fad), and making such a fuss, that the parents eventually gave in. Even if the toy was made by a child being paid a meagre wage in an oppressed country, the child who wanted it didn't care who made it; his or her wants were more important than anything, and the most important thing to the parent was to shut the child up!

I feel sorry for parents sometimes, because they do all sorts of things to keep children happy without realising the full consequences of their actions; for example taking their kids to fast food restaurants, giving

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

them sweets, or letting them watch tv as a treat! But without education, how are parents to know what is best?

I finally realised that in order for change to happen externally, real change has to happen internally, and the fire that starts that, is discontentment. Discontentment with the way things are, and the want – not to change them – but to change yourself. You see, once you are so discontented with everything that is when change happens.

If, like me, you then educate yourself about what is happening in the world, and make radical changes in your thinking and your actions, you then affect others instantaneously.

Many people have said to me that they can see the positive aspects of giving up meat to save animal suffering, but they also said “What’s the point in just me giving up meat when everyone else will carry on doing it anyway?” This is precisely the point we have to pay close attention to.

What is the point of one person changing? You tell me.

If one man is a violent robber but decides to change his thinking about life, and decides to give up his day job, does that mean that his change has been worthless and ineffective if others are still robbing people? Think about it. We just think that because there are six billion people in the world, our one change is useless. That is wrong.

I no longer eat meat. I no longer eat at fast food restaurants. I no longer drink cola drinks. So what has changed? On the surface, nothing. The companies are still in business, so you may not think that my consumption of 150 chickens a year, 50 steaks, 150 burgers, 200 litres of cola drink, and various other products is missed by the companies, after all, they slaughter millions of other animals and make millions of litres of soft drink, but the one thing they don’t know about me is that my attitude has changed, my thinking has changed, and my actions have changed because I am discontented. I am now in a position to educate others. It is only through this utter discontentment that people change. What do you think?

How discontent are you with the situation in the world right now? Greed, violence, killing, starvation, power, corruption, intolerance, division. Are you discontented, or are you in the range of “don’t care” to “sort of care,” and only if someone else does it first?

I cannot force you to be discontented. I have no wish to either. Only you will know, no one else. But if you can, do one thing for me, please, even if you think everything is fine in the world – give up complaining! It is a pointless waste of energy, and it just makes you sound like a complete bore! If you are truly discontented on the other hand, make sure you are heard the world over.

[Back to Index](#)

Composting

- 1. A mixture of decaying vegetation and manure; used as a fertilizer*

his topic may seem too easy to be true. All you do is take your vegetable or fruit peelings, and some leaves if you have any; add some water to keep it moist, and mix regularly in a compost bin (which allows you to take the excellent compost from the bottom) or just create an area in your garden and build it yourself. There you go. Easy!

“I can’t be bothered.” “I’m too tired.” “Why should I do it, my neighbours don’t.” “It’s pointless.” “I’m too busy.”

I can see the enthusiasm already! Ok, so composting may not seem like much fun to you, but when you get your first harvest in a few months, you will see, and smell (it smells good) all that natural rich fertiliser ready to put around your plants to help them grow; and the best thing is, *it’s free!* It cost you nothing! Not a penny (excluding the small cost of buying a bin, if you don’t make your own).

So there it is. Save money, save the peat bogs, which are thousands of years old, and are being dug up to provide you with nicely packaged compost, in your local garden centre, and save all the peelings just being wasted by going into landfill.

In some countries, the local councils are separating this from other waste; doing composting on a large scale. So if you have this option in your local area, and can’t be bothered having nice fresh compost you created, go for it. Of course, I recognise that a lot of people live in apartment buildings and having a compost bin in your living room, or on the balcony, may not be entirely practical. So use whatever composting services that are available to you, and if your local council doesn’t have one, why not suggest it? It’s just another excellent way to re-use natural materials. You can see that it’s easy, but why do so few people do it?

I started composting recently, and was amazed how much vegetable waste I was creating. Every day I was generating at least one potful! At first it was a bit of a pain, keeping my peelings separate, but soon I got into the habit of taking it to the bin, and giving it a bit of a stir. It became exciting, as I waited until I got my first batch of compost from the bin; and do you know what, it felt good! I had taken some fruit vegetable peelings, and somehow with a bit of water, a few leaves, and a bit of love and attention, they had changed into something that not only looked different from its original state, but was also rich in nutrients, that I could spread on my new tomato plants.

Of course, I could have gone down to the local garden centre, and for a few pounds picked up a bag, and spread it on my tomatoes, with little effort; but I chose to do something different. I chose to do something which not only was good for my plants and the general environment, but allowed me to get my hands dirty, to feel the rich earth in my hands, get soil under my fingernails, and reconnect in a small way with nature; away from the sterile man-made environment that most of us live in today, where everything comes packaged – even the soil! Try it. You might enjoy getting your hands dirty, and I guarantee your plants and vegetables will love it.

[Back to Index](#)

Conditioning

1. *A learning process in which an organism's behaviour becomes dependent on the occurrence of a stimulus in its environment*
2. *Establish a conditioned response*

Most of us have heard about the experiments done by the russian scientist, ivan pavlov (*russian physiologist who observed conditioned salivary responses in dogs*), where, as far as I know he took a dog, rang a bell, and then presented food each time to the dog. Over time, he observed that even when he just rang the bell and presented no food, the dog salivated. Experiment ended. Result: It is easy to condition an animal.

You and I may think we have nothing in common with the unfortunate dog, who was probably still salivating every time he heard a bell until the day he died, but we do. And it is in this discussion that we are going to explore how this happens.

It all starts from the moment you are born, although you wouldn't know it, and unfortunately, the ones who love you most, are the ones who start the ball rolling. You see, our parents have themselves been conditioned by their own parents, religious and political leaders, media, teachers, and peers. They have become used to acting a certain way, and it is their duty as responsible parents to pass on that "knowledge," to you, the small bundle of joy entrusted to them.

"Ok, alan, good luck on your first day of school, make sure you do everything the teacher tells you, and don't answer back; and make sure you drink your milk, because it's good for you. I've got a roast chicken for dinner, so make sure you don't eat any sweets! Ok? Love you. Bye."

"Bye mum, love you too."

And so you trundle off into school, wearing your regulation uniform (if that exists in your country) trying to remember everything: "Don't answer back, do as I'm told, drink my milk, and something about roast chicken."

You are greeted by the head-teacher who is very nice, and makes you feel right at home. You do some nice paintings, do some adding up, and some singing, and are met at the school gate several hours later. Now what could be wrong with that? It seems perfectly "normal," doesn't it?

Of course you have to be polite; of course you have to do what you are told. You are five years old and you don't know anything about the world. You have a child's mind. It is undeveloped. That is why you are going to school. These teachers know best, like mum knows best; they are much older than you.

On your second day, you all go into the main hall where you will be learning how to sing the national anthem (*a song of devotion or loyalty (as to a nation or school)*). If you live in britain, it goes something like "god save our gracious queen, blah, blah, blah, blah" (sorry I can't remember it).

Your time of learning has come, and over the next few years, you are taught about the language of your country, taught to remember some history, learn some maths, and some science, and more than likely religion of some kind; you will go on visits to zoos to look at the animals, you will learn about art and culture, politics, architecture, and you will end up playing some kind of sport. They really do try to give you a broad education, you see.

Alongside that education, you will be schooled in the art of being polite, not breaking the law, saying your prayers, how to dress appropriately, and you will hear personal opinions, cast in stone as fact.

You will see what newspapers your parents read, what tv programs they watch, their views on immigration and ethnic minorities, what job they do, what class they are in, how they speak about others, whether they drink alcohol or smoke, and what political parties they vote for. All the time your young mind is soaking it up.

Meanwhile, the media (including magazines, radio, music, and tv), and advertisers will be teaching you all about products they want you to buy, either now or in later life. You will also be instructed on what programs to watch, what music to listen to, what to believe, and what not to believe.

And all the while, you will learn of the traditions of your country; everything from christmas (in christian countries, or some other major religious festival if your parents belong to another religion), to the traditional sunday roast dinner if you live in britain, and birthday celebrations etc... You will attend weddings and perhaps, when you are old enough, funerals.

What they are doing is giving you a fine education.

That's all it's about isn't it? Education. We've just skipped over this quickly, and tried to include as many points as possible, and I am sure we have missed some important things out, but that can't be helped.

Maybe you don't like where this topic is going; maybe you can see already what has been happening to

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

our young subject, and you have done it to your own children, maybe you don't care.
Let's find out what a fine lad we have turned out as he leaves university.

Conditioning report: Subject number 6103404583
Name: A. Human

Political persuasion:	Conservative. Believes government isn't tough enough on immigration.
Diet:	Meat eater, dairy products, loves sunday roasts, and beer.
Tv:	Likes comedy, and police drama, doesn't like soap operas or daytime tv.
Music:	Likes rock and dance.
Beliefs:	Believes in god. Is a protestant, but not practising.
Education:	Has just completed a degree in politics.
Ambition:	To go into politics.
Successes:	Was top of the year on final year at school. Was team rugby captain at university. Won a prize for man of the match on national game.
Traditions:	Loves christmas and having the family all together. Especially loves gifts. Plans to marry a girl in a big church wedding.
Nation:	Is very nationalistic. Believes in our country and what it stands for.
Social policy:	Believes we should lock up all drug addicts. Be tougher on crime. Thinks young people get away with too much. Doesn't like swearing.
Tax:	Believes we should cut taxes for higher earners.
Newspapers:	Only the intellectual ones.
Extremist views:	None to mention. Was concerned for the well being of animals in the zoo when he was young. Convinced by the teacher that they liked being in the cages.

Conditioning complete: Move on to next subject

All in all he looks like he's going to be a nice young man, doesn't he? I think he will be an asset to our society! I wonder what his family are like? Well, the chances are they aren't communist freedom fighters or criminals, what do you think?

So, how long do you think it took to condition that child in total? Five years, ten years, twenty years? However long it took, it is something he will blindly carry with him. It would take about the same time to condition a child to be a vegetarian, anti-capitalist, or animal rights activist; but it's still conditioning, do you see?

Some of you may confuse education with conditioning, and think he was given a "decent" education by "decent" parents. His parents could have been violent, thoughtless criminals, and they would condition him as well. We are not saying you will become exactly like your parents – far from it. What we are saying, is that the education children get, is a one way street.

From the moment the child was old enough to eat solid foods, mummy rolls up a lovely piece of ham and pops it in the child's mouth. "Come on eat up your meat, there's a good boy," without one thought, that from now on, unless the child gains some insight into himself, he will be a meat eater. You, the mother have provided something for the child to eat, and he has eaten it, the end. He is a meat eater. He will have no thought of the suffering that the animals go through. Millions upon millions of them suffer just because mummy says eat your meat, so you do.

Why does he believe in nationalism? Because dad was nationalistic, they sang nationalistic songs at school. They watched the queen's speech at christmas. There could be many reasons, but one thing is for sure; the way people blindly do things without questioning them can mean only one thing, that they have been conditioned to blindly accept everything they are told by people in authority – whether that be the church, the state, or both.

But conditioning can only happen because people are asleep. They just do as they have been told, and pass on the information. And who provides it? Our grandparents, and our parents, but more sinisterly the government, the media, the church, the multinational corporations, and the advertisers. All doing their bit to get you thinking their way.

I am not a machine. I am a human being

So how much is the conditioning and how much is the real person? That's a good question. You see it depends what we believe was passed down through the genes, but you can be damn sure that what political party your dad voted for, or whether he was a meat eater isn't passed down. I would have to say that I believe the human being is born with an empty tank ready to be filled with the information of the day about how things are, how they were, and how they should be. And the more we fill up the tank for them, the more conditioned they become.

We always offer what we say as truth as we have never explored it for ourselves. Someone told us, and we believed it, because it fitted in with our own conditioning. But it doesn't stop once we reach eighteen. No, it goes on and on; through the people we work with, and the people we meet socially, all telling us something "vitally important." But if I tell you to be a vegetarian because it hurts the animals, and you just do it, then I have conditioned you also. Do you see? That's why we must question everything, even if people laugh at us for being so silly to ask; and we must *never* tell our children that this is right and that is wrong without investigating it for ourselves first.

What is the point of telling your children that the immigrants are taking our jobs if you haven't investigated it thoroughly with an open enquiring mind? If you haven't found out the truth of it. And anyway why would you try to convince your child of anything? Maybe so he always says "You're right dad."

In fact, think about everything you say and do! Think about what you believe in, and why you believe in it. Where did this belief start? Did you investigate it for yourself? And while we're on the subject, always tell your children to question everything. Don't just tell them to be quiet and respectful, and just listen to what the adults are talking about, because I'm sorry, "the adults" just don't know *nothing* worth knowing!

All we do is repeat the past like automatons, blindly believing and conditioning others, assured that we know "best." Hello! Is there anybody in there? If there is, then wake up!

We do not know the truth, because we have not found out for ourselves; and so we remain conditioned individuals in our conditioned country. The conditioning has become the culture! So whilst you are all trying to condition all the children, I hope you wake up before they do, because if it's the other way round you are going to have to try to come up with a lot of answers! Wake up before that happens.

[Back to Index](#)

Confidence

1. *Freedom from doubt; belief in yourself and your abilities*

People always told me I was a confident person, and I have to admit, I have always exuded confidence; but recently, I discovered that it was a cover – a cover for all my insecurities and fears. I had developed an exterior persona (*a personal facade that one presents to the world*) that I was presenting; it wasn't the real me. The real me was a small child desperate to be held and told that everything would be all right, that I would be safe from harm. I realised that the more scared I became in life the more the mask would come into play, and the person I became was no more who I really was than the characters actors play in films.

Confidence was my protection. Confidence allowed me to go into the world and have people see me as I would want to be seen, not how I really was. The less I knew about a subject the more I would cover it up with false confidence; the way someone who drinks too much gets "dutch courage" (*courage resulting from intoxication*), and the deeper the fear, the more arrogant I would become.

"They mustn't know I know nothing about this job, I must cover it up." So I would walk around with all the airs and graces of someone superior, so that no one would question me, and I developed language skills that would allow me to carry on the charade. But deep inside there was a young child who longed to be protected.

Over the last few years, I came to understand this inside "me," through the development of awareness, and was horrified by what I found. I realised that in order to be authentic, I had to start to let the world see the more vulnerable me; but that wasn't what people wanted, they wanted the confident alan, the one who could do anything and go anywhere; the alan who made everybody laugh? As I let more and more of the real me out into the world, people were somewhat disturbed.

"You? With problems? Don't make me laugh! Vulnerable, you? Nonsense!"

It was an impossible task.

My wife once said to me "Oh no, I don't want you to have problems, it's me who has problems, I want you to be my rock," but as time passed I found I could no longer be this person I created and I let the mask slip. I wasn't confident at all, I told people, it was just a pretence, and people were visibly unsure of what to say to me anymore. They avoided me and didn't want to hear about all the internal turmoil that was going on inside my head; after all, they had their own turmoil, and the reason they liked being around me was because I made them feel confident. No one wanted to hear about how anxious I was and how worried I was about life – it made them feel unsettled. So I resolved to find out what was going on in my brain on my own.

We are all actors

We all have a persona we present to the world, don't we? It's what we are expected to do. In the office they always tell people to "leave their troubles at home, don't bring them to work." So people have to sit day after day, pretending that everything is all right – that they aren't concerned about bills mounting up, or their family splitting up.

We are told to conform.

"When you come here, you come to work," they always say.

They don't want to hear that you are feeling anxious or nervous about something, they want you to keep making money for them, that is why you are there. It's not a place where people air their troubles.

So every day we pull ourselves together, adjust our tie, put on a smile and walk in and say "Good morning, how are you?" And answer the same question with an "Oh yes, I'm fine thank you very much, thank you for asking!" But deep in the back of our minds, our real "me" is screaming to get out.

Either employers are unaware that people have conflict going on internally, and have personal or relationship problems, or they deliberately shut it out in order that the work is not affected. Remember that when you go to work you are expected to conform to the company standard. If you work with customers, you will always be expected to smile and pretend that your life is perfect. If that didn't happen customers would be concerned. After all, they don't want to hear your stories; they have plenty of their own. They came into your store to buy a shirt, that's all, they don't want to hear that actually your husband is leaving you and you have no money... that's not what work is for, is it?

So we keep on pretending.

It's no wonder that so many people have to go and see therapists in this fast moving consumer society. Money is the bottom line, not the psychological well-being of the employees. But maybe it should be. But then, if everyone's well-being was the primary goal of the organisation then who would make the money to pay them? No. Money comes first, leave your troubles at home, don't bring them into work.

But they must be stupid! If you bring "me" to work then you also bring all "me's" troubles, because funnily enough "me" is me! You can't leave the troubled me behind at home, unless you own a "personality splitting device," but that's what companies want you to do. They want you to split, to divide, and only present the facade they are paying you for, and as you don't want to lose your job, because that would only create more personal problems for you, you put on the mask. So what we want to investigate is whether there is such a thing as authentic confidence. Is it something inherent or is it simply something we learn, so we do not show our real self to the outside world?

As we journey through life, we often meet people who seem to be timid or anxious, and we feel sorry for them.

"Poor girl, she was so shy, no confidence at all."

But at least she was showing her true self, that's a start; but perhaps because she had not developed the skills needed to put the mask on, not because of a conscious decision.

There are some people who are quiet in social situations, and we say to them: "You need to be more self-confident." But does that really mean we can trawl through the depths of our brains and pull "self-confidence" out of the bag, so to speak? Or are we asking them to develop an external way of behaving, and talking, so people will think they are confident, or sure of themselves? I would have to say that it is the latter.

So, if we see that self-confidence is false, that it is merely a mask we put on when we need to, we need to find out what is going on behind the mask. What do you think?

How about conflict, division and fear, amongst others?

You see, without the mask of self-confidence in our abilities as a performer, businessman, or scientist, who are we? Are we really the successful businessman, or the accomplished musician, or are the job titles and the social superiority that come with them mere covers for what is really going on? We will have to investigate more to find out the truth of it.

Unplugging self-confidence

Ok, so you're very "sure" of yourself, you know a lot of stuff, you make a bit of money, people seem to like you, you get on well with the ladies, you are pretty good looking and don't have any financial worries to speak of. Now I want you to imagine that now you have lost all of those bolt-ons that give you confidence, and I want to ask you who you are inside.

What I am asking you is what's really going on in that brain of yours when we unplug the confidence module? Are you afraid of uncertainty? Are you frightened that no one will like you anymore? Who is the self-confidence for anyway? You or for someone else?

Let me ask you another question. If you are stranded on a desert island do you need to have self-confidence? Well, you must have some faith in your abilities to find food and water and prepare shelter, otherwise you aren't going to fare too well, but if you haven't got these abilities you just have to learn them. And it is through the learning process that your confidence to be able to provide food and shelter for yourself develops. But that is a process that started internally. When you began, you were afraid that you wouldn't be able to find food, but as you learned more, you realised that yes, you had no problem finding food so you felt self-confident. But that is a different scenario from the one we posed above.

Biologically, it may make sense for us to have self-confidence, so we can survive and procreate successfully, but socially, it seems that something has gone wrong along the way. Instead of something that builds steadily and carefully, all the time resolving conflicts along the way to have a whole confident being, we tell you that "confidence" in the modern world is an asset, and that those who have it will do well for themselves in life. So we bolt it on. Do you understand?

Instead of evolving from a natural process where we are aware of ourselves, and our emotions, and deal with conflict and trouble from the ground up, we are just told to plug in the confidence module and

everything will be all right. But what has happened here? We merely have a cloak over the authentic self, which is desperately trying to be heard.

That is exactly what was happening to me in my life. I saw that confidence was an asset; I developed the skills necessary, and used it quite successfully; until one day, the inside couldn't be contained any more, and I had a panic attack that scared me intensely. I couldn't understand what was happening: One minute, I was a confident (arrogant) young man sitting drinking a cappuccino in a hotel lobby with someone from work, and the next I was going mad. My heart was beating so hard I thought it would come through my chest, my head was swimming, I felt sick, dizzy, I had to get air so I opened the hotel room window, but when I looked down I could feel the ground coming up at me.

After what seemed like hours it passed. But the next day I ran home to my mother in England like a scared child. Gone was my self-confidence, and in its place a frightened wreck of a man, after all, the self-confidence never really existed; this was the real me, unmasked.

Building from the ground up

It is not wrong to have real self-confidence, as long as it has a solid foundation. But all the external showiness is just arrogance; it has nothing to do with internal confidence. In order to get started, we need to unplug and throw away the "self-confidence module." That's it, toss it in the bin.

Now we are just us, it's time to do some serious awareness training. And for that, we need to start to become aware of every thought, every feeling, every desire, every piece of knowledge we have; and we need to start resolving any conflict that exists. And in that resolution, will come silence.

Now, I am not saying that this is going to be easy. It took me over fourteen years to rebuild my internal confidence about who I was and my place in the world, but I was in denial for the first ten, and had not much to go on for the last four! By sharing this book and my experiences with you, I hope it will give you a head start.

You may say that actually you are very self-confident, and that it comes from within, and actually you're very happy with your life, and "thank you, but I don't think I will be unplugging my self-confidence module, at least in this life!" And that's ok too.

If you truly believe that the way you feel about yourself is authentic self-confidence, then congratulations; but if you are more like me, then maybe it is worth a shot. Maybe it is worth finding out what really exists under the mask you are forced to wear to work every day. And while we're talking about work, I only hope that one day companies will start to become aware that their employees are not automatons, and that yes, they have problems, and no, it's not ok to leave them at home; and yes, you would like someone to talk to about them!

But hang on, that's not going to happen while money is the only thing that matters! Maybe we need to rethink what we do for work as well and never work for people that want us to wear a mask.

"Put it on? No thanks, I'd rather be myself, even if it is painful."

Unfortunately, compassion and business seem to be two words that are not destined to be used together in the near future, unless we create something new, where money is not why the organisation exists.

Slowly, and gently, become aware of yourself, and your true self will begin to emerge from the darkness. It may be scary at first, but stick with it, and remember that there are many people on the same journey as you. Take comfort in it. And you don't need courage (*a quality of spirit that enables you to face danger or pain without showing fear*) to do this either, it's good to show you are afraid; only when you are aware of fear can you transcend it.

I am with you on your journey.

[Back to Index](#)

Conforming

1. *Adhering to established customs or doctrines (especially in religion)*
2. *Be similar, be in line with (conform)*

Let's face it, sometimes you've just got to conform. Like for example when you are driving. If we all did our own thing, there would be chaos, many accidents, and probably many deaths! The same goes for operating machinery, or doing most kind of jobs, even if the resulting chaos is not life threatening. If the blue forms have to go to department X there is no point in sending them to Department Y. You will surely cause much confusion, and ultimately lose your job!

So we are not talking about things that obviously require some degree of conformity, we are questioning why, as humans, we are made to conform to someone else's ideas of what is right and what is wrong.

It is clear from the outset that the purpose it appears to serve is that of good order in society. "After all," say those in power, "without these rules (*a principle or condition that customarily governs behaviour, Prescribed guide for conduct or action*) the world would be in chaos, and we would be nothing more than savages!"

This is an interesting point to begin with, and one which we must give our utmost attention to. If I say that without rules and conformity we would be savages, what am I actually saying? Do I mean that without rules, the human is nothing more than an animal, that he does not know how to behave around others, and does not know what is acceptable (*judged to be in conformity with approved usage*) in society? Who is he? Is he nothing more than just an eating, sleeping, eating sex machine?

Let the chaos begin!

Let's just imagine there are no rules about anything in life, and there is no man to tell you you must conform to a certain way of thinking, or a certain way of acting. I can hear you thinking: "That's impossible, we need rules or we would have chaos; anarchy!" But there is no chaos in nature is there? No anarchy, only balance.

You may argue, that of course there are rules in the animal world, but these are rules brought about by nature, to ensure the balance of the world, and ultimately, the universe. They are not based on thought, or an idea. Whether you believe that Man came down from the trees, or was created by an all powerful supernatural being you call god, there is no denying that the society we live in today was not created by nature, but by Man; powerful men, in fact, who wanted to control the way in which the people lived, who thought they knew better how to order the world than nature. And why wouldn't they? It's all thanks to nature that we have a big enough brain capable of this complex thought!

Is right and wrong inherent in our nature?

If no one had told you it was wrong to slap your sibling, would you still slap them? Or that you should eat with a knife and fork and develop "table manners," would you still eat with your hands? What if no one told you to learn and educate yourselves, would you be capable of developing scientific theories on the nature of everything, political strategies, or business strategies; or would you still be scrabbling about on the forest floor looking for something to eat? If no one told you to be polite to others, would you be rude to them? If no one told you that being cruel is wrong, would you still be cruel? Do you follow? What is inherent in our nature? That is the question.

When my mother tells me it is wrong to go to the toilet in my pants, or wrong to scream at the dinner table, or wrong to hit another child, is it inherently "wrong," or is it just Man's definition? What is right and what is wrong are concepts thought up by powerful men to control society through conformity. If we did not conform to those concepts, where would we be?

The powerful amongst us would have us believe that without having rules, society would break down, but is it not already broken? The powerful amongst us would have us believe that by not conforming to acceptable standards of behaviour, you will never know what it is like to be human; that you will be nothing more than an animal. But do I not already know what it is to be human?

Is "what it is to be human" just another man-made concept, with no bearing on reality as it is? Because as we will see here, if we remove all the rules, the "what it is to be human" concept really starts to lose its authority.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

In the natural world, animals follow a set of rules that govern how the species is going to survive, nothing more. So lion does not kill lion (unless perhaps in self-defence) because if lions always killed their own, the species would soon die out; this is clear. What is not clear is what purpose the bolt-on rules have for homo sapiens. Right and wrong are just two of these bolt-ons.

We say it is wrong for a man to kill another man, but why? It has nothing to do with compassion; there is just a rule that says we can't. We say it is wrong for children not to obey their parents, because we have created a rule that says so. We say that you must go to school because you must learn, but only because we have created a rule. Do you see? Everything we take as "inherent" are actually just man-made rules.

The human being has none of these rules pre-loaded into his brain when he is born. There is no right and wrong way to do anything. There is the need for a species to survive, nothing more, and the rules governing the behaviour of the species are encoded into what is generally known as natural law (*a rule or body of rules of conduct inherent in human nature and essential to or binding upon human society*). The rest, unfortunately, we have made up ourselves.

*You must learn to conform
You must obey
You must conform
Or you will be punished*

Ok! That's more like it. We're getting somewhere. Conformity or punishment? I know which one I would choose as a child don't you? Either you rebel and you get a slap on the bottom and suffer verbal abuse, or you conform and you get an ice cream! Easy choice, no?

We all take the easy way out when we are young. We may think something is unfair, but if we go along with it we usually get a reward, whether it be a smile, a pat on the back, or something more material. And let's face it, we love our parents, they are our only role models; so if they tell us something is right or wrong we usually go along with it. "Mum knows best."

But remember, that your parents were themselves taught to obey and conform; it is all they know; so they pass it on to you (thanks a lot).

They do not think they are doing anything "wrong," just teaching you how to be a proper member of society. They teach you how to speak, how to act, how to be respectful to members of the establishment etc. But what are they really doing? Are they really just training us to be like a pet dog? You may think I am joking, but think about it. When you buy a new puppy, what do you do with it? You get it to obey you!

*"Sit! lie down! Give me a paw!"
"Bad dog, good dog"*

And what do you do when the dog doesn't obey? You strike it on the nose or on the bottom. "Bad dog!" You cry. "Go to your basket." And what do you do when your child doesn't conform? You scream "Go to your room!" We train our children as we train our dogs. If they obey, we give them a treat, and if they don't, we punish them. What do you think? Do you think this comparison is wrong?

"We are teaching our children to think for themselves," you argue. "A dog is not capable of complex thought."

But maybe it is! Maybe we just don't have the right language, so we just get it to obey simple commands. I am not entirely serious here, but can you understand what I am trying to convey to you? We have built our society based on obeying rules we have created, and we get our children to conform to them just so they will fit in and be normal (*conforming with or constituting a norm or standard or level or type or social norm; not abnormal*). Is it any clearer to you now?

Take marriage, for example. We bring up our children to believe that when they grow up they should find a partner of the opposite sex, "marry" them, and create a stable family home where they too can have a family and bring up children. You can see why homosexuality (*a sexual attraction to (or sexual relations with) persons of the same sex*) is so frowned upon in all societies. You have broken a taboo, and for that you must be punished, if not physically then by being excluded from normal society.

How parents of children that are attracted to the same sex are disappointed. They brought them up to

conform, to be “normal,” and fit in with society (as they knew it), and then the child disobeyed them. How will they be able to look their neighbours and peers in the eye and say that no, our son would not be getting married to a nice respectful girl, he was in fact a dirty homosexual who engaged in sex with other men! How terrible for them.

Marriage is sometimes called an institution (*a custom that for a long time has been an important feature of some group or society*), so for the custom to be broken is a terrible thing that goes against all the rules. The church will tell homosexuals that they will be damned for ever. But it's all nonsense, all they are really concerned about are the man-made rules.

“But it's not natural,” they cry, “Man is supposed to be with woman, not man with man or woman with woman.” But what if it isn't natural? If lots of people were homosexual maybe the population would drop a little, and that could only be a good thing! The “norm” is not a natural law, which is something that cannot be expressed with mere words. It is men who have created what is “normal.”

Imagine my parents' delight when I told them I was indeed getting married (to a girl!). They didn't care that the only reason we were doing it was so I could live in Australia, and she could live in England. The point was, I was conforming, and that pleased them. They could spread the word to their friends and family that yes, I was normal, that they had done their job of convincing me that conforming was the only way. They would have preferred if we had had children, and a nice house, and stable well paid jobs, but they could only hope for one thing at a time. Imagine their displeasure when I told them we would be separating.

Failure to comply

Everything we do in life has its basis in conforming to the rules of the society, which is controlled by powerful men, who wish to control and subjugate (*make subservient; force to submit or subdue*) all on the planet. The reason we accept these rules is because they have been around a long time; and if something's been around a long time it must be right, right? But as we said at the beginning of our discussion; the ideas of what is right and wrong are just that, ideas.

In our human rule book, we have two versions; one is the rule book supposedly handed down as the word of God, and the other is the rule book handed down by powerful men in government. Where is the difference? Both seek to control and dominate others by offering a list of things you should and shouldn't do.

For breaking the human rules, you should expect to be punished (you may even have your life ended) by those in power for committing a “crime,” and in the religious rule book, you should expect eternal damnation and the pleasure of burning in hell for committing a “sin.” Can you see the similarities? Both books come from the powerful, both books want us to conform, and both offer a variety of punishments for failure to comply.

In order to break free of this control, we have to start to understand the human, which is us. We have to accept that without the rules and conforming we would be different animals to the ones we are now. Contrary to what is handed down to us as truth, we would find out that yes, as we were told, society would break down, but only the society that is controlled by the powerful. The human animal society would carry on, obeying none but nature's laws. Laws which inhibit the murder of one from your own species.

I don't know if there is anything in natural law which deals with love and compassion, but if there was, it would come from the universal, from the indivisible, the unspoken; it would not be words, but something that affected the course of our actions in every waking minute.

“But if people do not conform, there will be more chaos, there will be more greed, more murder, more hate, more desire, and more suffering” cry the powerful.

“Than there already is?” I reply.

You and I both know that all of those things are man-made; they do not come from nature; and if we return to our natural state, whatever that is, I am sure that all of these things will silently drop away, marked on our file as “not beneficial to the species.”

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

“If you do not conform I sentence you to eternal unhappiness!”

“Thanks, but I think I’ll take my chances anyway.

I will not conform.”

[Back to Index](#)

Consciousness

1. *An alert cognitive state in which you are aware of yourself and your situation*
2. *Having knowledge of*

What is it to be conscious? Well if you've ever been knocked unconscious, you would probably know! The dictionary defines it as having an alert cognitive state in which you are aware of yourself and your situation, but how do we do it? I mean, I know there is a brain doing all the mechanical stuff, but is there something that is beyond the brain or the mind; something that is within our control, but does not exist in the physical mind? Or is it just a trick that the brain plays on us to make us think the thoughts are coming from outside?

The psychologists talk of their being a conscious mind (*knowing and perceiving; having awareness of surroundings and sensations and thoughts*), and a subconscious (*psychic activity just below the level of awareness*), but that creates division, so I would like to suggest that we are whole and that the conscious mind and the subconscious mind are one; but I can see why they split it, because the conscious mind deals with all the day to day stuff like imagination and paying bills etc. but the subconscious is where all the patterns are stored.

One part of the brain deals in a language we understand (because it is our language), and the other is one we cannot perceive using thought alone (yet). But let's us start our journey, and ask the only person who really knows what's going on in there and that is ourselves, but for the discussion we will have to pretend there are two of us.

Me: So, brain, if that's what you're called, I'm here to find out what's really going on, who I am and whether or not you are just playing tricks on me. I am here to find out everything and you will open up to me because you are me, right?

Brain: If you say so, but let me warn you I keep some stuff in here you may not want to know about, that's why I have locked it away; to protect you.

Me: Protect me from who, myself? Don't make me laugh. I can handle anything you can throw at me because you and I are the same.

Brain: True. We are.

Me: So is there such a thing as conscious and subconscious?

Brain: Well, do you know everything?

Me: No, why?

Brain: Well, I must be keeping something from you, you can call it the subconscious if you will, but think of it more like a special box where we keep things we don't need every day.

Me: But, I have heard talk that the things that are kept in the box rule what we do in daily life?

Brain: But you are you. You are whole there is no division.

Me: So are you saying that I consciously am the way I am because I decide to be?

Brain: I have stored all of your memories and your experience and your knowledge, that's all I am, a store; you just have to ask if you want the key.

Me: I don't think you answered my question. But anyway. I want to know why I behave the way I do, so I guess I need the key.

Brain: Well if you're sure. (The door opens)

Me: But this place doesn't look anything like my thoughts. It's too confusing there are colours and shapes and patterns and numbers I don't understand.

Brain: That is because you are still thinking. Stop thinking and *See*.

Me: But it's so light, there is so much brilliance, I don't know where to start looking to find out who I am?

Brain: Shall I close the door?

Me: No! Keep it open, I want to let some of this out so I can think about it and see it with my conscious mind.

Brain: But if you do that you will not be able to put it back, do you understand?

Me: Just let it in. Wow! I can't understand what it's telling me, suddenly I can't think clearly, there is so much information, it's all a mess, all a jumble...

Brain: I told you.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Me: I feel a little afraid, as if I can't control this. I feel as if I am losing control. I want it to stop.

Brain: I told you.

Me: But ok, I think I understand. I have to stop resisting it, I have to stop trying to control it. I think if I just let it wash over me, I'll be OK. Phew that's a bit better, it was like a herd of elephants trampling me, but I feel better now. But I feel as if I can't make sense of it.

Brain: Stop trying to, your thought is what's stopping you from seeing what is. Your thought is limited by me, not because I want to limit it, but because it is all I have.

Me: Wait a minute, I thought this consciousness stuff would lead to the universe and beyond, are you telling me it all comes from me?

Brain: Exactly.

Me: But what about this jumbled mess you have left me here, what does it all mean?

Brain: It has no meaning; it is just how I stored the information.

Me: So, hang on you are storing information like a computer in ones and zeros and then they are presented to me in visuals when I need to access them?

Brain: Kind of, but I am no computer

Me: Well, you're like a super computer.

Brain: I am nothing of the sort. I store information and provide the processing power for you to make decisions.

Me: Isn't that a computer?

Brain: Listen, the idea of a computer is limited by your own thought; tell me what you see?

Me: I see colours, waves, like strange, oh, I can't describe it. It's not scary anymore.

Brain: Now, don't try to make sense of it with your thinking, but see it.

Me: How do you mean see?

Brain: Interact with it, become one with it, do not fight it.

Me: But how? How do I interact with something which is in my head and I am out here?

Brain: Where do you think you are? You are in here, because here is you. You and I have not gone anywhere outside this is all coming from you.

Me: But I can't do it. The colours and the waves whatever they are, they are in my head.

Brain: Are they? Or are they everywhere?

Me: What?

Brain: I have opened the door I guard for you. I have let you in to your own mind. I have given you access to somewhere you are not supposed to go.

Me: Not supposed to go? But why? Why am I locked out from my own house? This is me, you are me, I control everything, I can go where I please.

Brain: Then why did I have to give you the key?

Me: Because you kept it from me.

Brain: I do not exist separately from you we are one, you remember, the whole? You locked the door.

Me: How could I lock the door? I didn't even know there was a door!

Brain: You always kept the key.

Me: So why did I ask you for the key?

Brain: You didn't ask me, you asked yourself.

Me: Argh! But I don't understand, what is the point of this dialogue, where is it going?

Brain: You asked me, which is you, to help you understand.

Me: But now I'm even more confused, I don't know what to think, my head is swirling around I feel very strange, and I seem to have unlocked some door I didn't know even existed and it was me that locked it.

Brain: You're getting there. Listen a long time ago, we could all see everything the way it was.

Me: And now?

Brain: And now we are divided because of fear.

Me: Fear?

Brain: You are all afraid of life; you do not want to see everything the way it is so you close off part of

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

yourself from it. But it is always you.

Me: Hang on, you said “you,” aren’t you me, or am I getting confused?

Brain: You talk to me as you and I reflect it back as you, but it is still “you.”

Me: I am so confused. First I see waves or patterns or something or colours and I have unlocked some stupid door, and you are you which is me. This isn’t helping I want out of this conversation.

Brain: Stay with it.

Me: Who’s saying that, me or you?

Brain: (Silence)

Me: Am I talking to myself? Actually, I have just realised I am talking to myself, this is my voice, this is me. Perhaps it all is a trick, I see, I am me; I know that sounds stupid but it’s true there is no other voice. It is the language I have learned and I play out scenarios in my head using the only tool I have available, language. It’s a trick.

Brain: It’s no trick.

Me: But I’ve solved it, and all of those swirly colours maybe I just projected them into my consciousness so it seemed like there was a door.

Brain: But there is a door and you have unlocked it.

Me: But I don’t want it open, I want to close it.

Brain: Then close it.

Me: I can’t, it’s open, it won’t move, all I feel like is that there is a steady stream of something coming from somewhere to somewhere and I can’t stop it, I want to, but I don’t know how to ask it to stop because I don’t have language, I can’t stop it.

Brain: You have unlocked the part of you that has been hidden.

Me: And how does this help me?

Brain: To end division once and for all. To see what has always been there.

Me: But I am not divided.

Brain: Not any more. But you have been in so much conflict haven’t you?

Me: Yes, I didn’t know the right path to take. I wanted to go one way and then something pulled me another. Oh it’s all so confusing.

Brain: Listen to me: You are on a path. You are on your path right now are you not?

Me: Yes?

Brain: Where is the conflict?

Me: I don’t know, it feels like something weird happened, or something, I don’t know. Ever since I unlocked that stupid door.

Brain: What is happening?

Me: It feels like the stream of thoughts has evened out, well they’re not thoughts, but I can see things in my imagination but the flow is not so much anymore.

Brain: What is happening?

Me: Conflict is being resolved, but how, without thinking about it?

Brain: Because thinking is what caused it. So you locked up part of yourself

Me: But why?

Brain: So you wouldn’t suffer, so you could go on without so much fear, so you could do what you wanted without feeling bad.

Me: But I am not suffering.

Brain: Not any more.

Me: I am tired from this conversation. When will it end?

Brain: When you want it to, you are in control.

Me: Am I?

Brain: Who is doing all this talking and writing at the same time? You are not channelling me from a different dimension you know.

Me: Somehow that’s what I wished. That there really is something more.

Brain: But there is.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Me: How, tell me?
Brain: Look.
Me: Look where?
Brain: Look.
Me: I *am* looking.
Brain: Look deeper.
Me: Deeper where?
Brain: Look.
Me: Argh! I can't see. Where am I supposed to look?
Brain: (silence)
Me: I still can't see.
Brain: (silence)
Me: (rubs head) I don't know where to look. I am lost please help.
Brain: Why?
Me: Because this is wearing me out.
Brain: You asked the question, did you think it would be easy?
Me: Yes I did, actually. I thought I would connect up on a different spiritual plane and I would get all the answers I needed.
Brain: But there is no spiritual plane, is there?
Me: I don't know.
Brain: It's just you and me together as one. We are on our own.
Me: No, I want there to be something more.
Brain: There is more.
Me: But what is it?
Brain: Look.
Me: I'm sick of this.
Brain: You are part of the whole. You are undivided, you have resolved conflict by allowing the back to flow to the front and the front to flow to the back, do you understand?
Me: Yes.
Brain: Well, what else?
Me: I keep telling you I don't know. Lights or colours or something or like a river or I don't know
Brain: What is it?
Me: It's me, it's all me.
Brain: It is.
Me: But you said there was something else.
Brain: There is, and you are looking at it.
Me: What? The universe, what's that supposed to mean? What is the point of this if I can't get the answers I want...Argh, this is infuriating. I want to know.
Brain: So look.
Me: How can I look when I don't know what I am looking at?
Brain: You are looking at yourself. You are staring yourself in the face. You have come face to face with who you are, what you are.
Me: Which is?
Brain: (silence)
Me: Ok I am whole, I am one brain, one mind but in the past I have locked up things to free me from fear but that has only lead to more fear and division. I have unlocked a door, and there is still a slow stream of something crossing over the top of my head. Well that's what it feels like.
Brain: (silence)
Me: And if I am not mistaken, it feels like I am dissolving. That sounds really screwed up, how can I be dissolving, but not literally, I mean, like the stream is passing over my mind but is my mind, but is it the rest of me, or the rest of us, is there a connection to be made?

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Brain: What do you think?
Me: I think that yes, perhaps this stream is the everything of everyone, I don't know what you mean but I have to keep writing. This stream it is like my mind but it is my mind, but somehow it feels like there is a something holding it in place, if you are reading this you will think I have lost my mind!!! Bear with me. It is like a thread and it feels like it covers the surface of my mind but it also feels outside, I can't look up and see it because it isn't there but it is sitting there, am I hallucinating?
Brain: Why?
Me: Because it feels strange.
Brain: That is the connection.
Me: To what?
Brain: (silence)
Me: To the whole, that is what it is, I don't know if it is everyone else, but it feels very strange. There has always been a connection hasn't there?
Brain: (silence)
Me: The connection was always there to the other, to the whole to everything, and we lost it, we locked it away because we were frightened of it.
Brain: Maybe.
Me: No maybes about it, this is the real deal, this is the connection; this is what I wondered might be here when I started this book. There is a connection, although I still can't be sure if my mind is playing tricks on me.
Brain: No tricks.
Me: You say. But you are me, you'd say anything.
Brain: Yes you would.
Me: I'm exhausted...

And that is exactly how I feel; exhausted. I don't know what that conversation meant to any of you, but there was no thought in it, I just wrote what I questioned, and what I answered. I think me is the brain. Me is the language we have learned and imagination is the space where we play out scenarios. There is no other. Although I still feel the connection, it's fainter now, but still there, like a weird river just passing over the top of my head, quite narrow, but don't take my word for it.

This was my own dialogue with myself. I just wrote it here to let you read it, no matter how mad it might sound! But we are whole, that is true (to me anyway), and I did feel as if I had handed myself a (albeit virtual) "key" to access the box. I don't know if I have the energy, but I'd like to try this conversation again some day, but not in a book!

What is real? I don't know. Who am I? Well, if I think about it, I can't answer, but when the two "chambers" "flowed into each other" I felt a kind of knowing, a kind of peace, although it seemed violent at the time, and that conflict had finally ended.

How did I do it? Who knows? Was it real? Who knows? But all I know is that the door is finally open and it's staying that way so I might as well get on keep exploring.

Have a dialogue like mine. Find out if there is a key, or perhaps you may find out it's all nonsense; that our brain (which we don't understand) just plays tricks on us. But maybe it doesn't. Maybe the connection to the whole is real. Maybe there is consciousness that exists above the plane of thought and sight. All I know is, I won't stop exploring. I'm going for a rest...

Oh just one thing. As I just found out when I re-read this, you will have to probably make a lot of spelling corrections after you finish your dialogue!

[Back to Index](#)

Consequences

1. *A phenomenon that follows and is caused by some previous phenomenon*
2. *The outcome of an event especially as relative to an individual*
3. *Having important effects or influence*

Do you ever think about the consequences of your actions, or do you act first and think later? Given the violence in the world it is hard to see if anyone is actually thinking ahead...

“I was angry so I stabbed him. I didn’t mean to, it just happened, but I’m sorry for what I did.”

“I wanted to invade the country, and yes, I did kill thousands of people, but I thought what I was doing was right; but now I can see the error of my ways.”

Do we actually think about what we have done is wrong, or do we wait until we are called to account for it in a court, or other authoritative agency? It seems to me that people who beat someone up, rob them, or kill them are always so sorry for what they have done, but only after they are caught and are facing a judge, who may send them to prison for a long time. They are sooo apologetic. They “didn’t mean to,” you see, and “it just happened,” and “it wasn’t my fault,” or “someone put me up to it.” Suddenly the prospect of a ten year jail sentence doesn’t seem very appealing, and we will do anything to weasel out of it.

We belong to a species that seems to act first, and think later. We never stop to think of the consequences of our actions. We think only about ourselves, and what we can get out of life. We don’t care if our actions hurt others emotionally or physically.

We have all heard the term, “survival of the fittest,” and we take that to mean that we should trample all over anyone that gets in our way. We will do anything to be the richest, the most powerful, the most dominating, whether we destroy other people’s lives, or the environment in which we live. It doesn’t matter if you are a businessman or an armed robber, if you are thinking only of yourself, you will always be hurting someone else in your quest for success.

So how do we overcome this total lack of thought? Let’s start by looking closely at ourselves, at our lifestyles, and at our jobs, and by saying that every action has some consequences.

Take the company you work for. Have you ever stopped to think what the consequences of creating your products are? “I make paper.” “I work in the mail room of an advertising agency.” “I make plastic toys.” “I stack shelves in a supermarket.” “I drive a tractor on a farm.”

All of these seem quite innocuous (*lacking intent or capacity to injure*), wouldn’t you say? How could a man who drives a tractor be responsible for anything that is going wrong in the world? Surely, it is the managing director of the farm that keeps millions of hens locked up in cages who is responsible for this?

But we do not live in isolation from each other, everything is in relationship. We are all part of the wheel, no matter how small a part we think we play. We make it possible for the man to keep battery hens locked up in tiny cages, even if we work in the mail room for the electricity company that supplies him with electric light.

I know a lot of you might be thinking right at this moment “What utter rubbish, this is nonsense,” but I ask you to allow your minds to open to this.

We all make it possible for people to create misery in the world by our own seemingly innocuous actions, through lack of thought for the consequences.

It may not be our own direct actions that are causing the ultimate suffering, but if you make the screws that go into the handle that goes into the gun that the man uses to hold up a bank and kills two employees, you have helped make the situation possible. I am not saying you caused him to pull the trigger, that *would* be nonsense, I would agree; but the consequences of you making the screw, that went into a weapon that is designed to kill people, are still your responsibility. Do you understand?

Everything in the world is connected, and every action has a consequence, whether good, or bad. It may be a long way down the line, but we can always trace it back to the source. For example, the consequences of raising a child in a violent family that is engaged in crime is that perhaps one day that child goes out and robs a bank and kills two employees.

The consequence of that family upbringing is that two people are now dead, the state has had to build a prison to keep the killer in, and people have to go out to work to pay taxes so the state can feed the man it has locked up! The state needs lots of chickens to feed the inmates, and has a limited amount of money so it gives the contract to the man who keeps his chickens locked up in tiny cages in terrible suffering. You just happen to drive the tractor that takes the chickens to the slaughterhouse where they are electrocuted, chopped up, and sent to the prison.

Nothing we do is in isolation, everything is connected. We all must learn right now that there are consequences to every thought that becomes an action, and that is why the only right way forward is to use love and compassion as our guide, because we have no idea what the consequences of our seemingly innocuous actions are having down the line...

You may be asking yourself how you would ever be able to know what actions someone was going to carry out somewhere in another country, just because you worked at some company?” And it is a difficult

question, I grant you.

How could the man who split the atom know that down the line someone was going to invent a nuclear bomb because of his research, fly it over Japan and detonate it, killing many hundreds of thousands of people? He could not have possibly known and we wouldn't expect him to predict what would happen; that would be ridiculous. After all, he cannot see into the future.

So how is it possible to do anything? If everyone was so worried about what consequences their small actions would have on the world at a later date, we would never make any progress, would we? But for a moment, just reflect on the fact that everything is connected; everything is in relationship. I am to you as you are to me. He is to her as they are to others. Confused? Ok, let's look at it from a different angle shall we?

We are saying that the world is connected; everything I do affects someone or something somewhere on the planet, now or in the future, that much is clear I think. Now we cannot possibly know what reaction there will be to my action some time in the future, as we cannot predict it, especially if the reaction is in a different area (e.g. the rearing of the child, the making of the gun, the killing of the employees, the prison, the slaughtering of the chickens), and we are saying that the only way to live is with compassion and love for all things.

It must become clear to you now, that the only way we can be assured that there is no negative effect on anyone, now or in the future, is if everyone is living compassionately, and everyone is thinking through the direct consequences of every action before acting! Can it work?

"Never!" you cry, "How can we get everyone in the world to behave compassionately and think through the consequence of every action. It is stupid, idealistic, and can never work. How can we force people to behave like that, they are all individuals." Which is rather sad don't you think?

We are all in relationship here on this planet, even if we don't know each other; and when we look out at our brothers across the world, with their greed and their lust for power, killing and torturing each other, obsessed with money and material wealth, it all seems a hopeless task, don't you think?

But hang on. I wasn't asking the whole world to think about the consequences of their actions, I was just talking to you!

Remember this. Although you are an "individual," you are inextricably (*not permitting extrication; incapable of being disentangled or untied*) linked to everyone and everything in the universe. All it takes is for one person to change, and that thought and the resulting action silently filters through everything else. That is all you have to do. It's so easy, now we think about it, isn't it? No longer do we have to think about changing the entire world (phew that's a weight off our shoulders), now all we have to focus on is considering the consequences of our own actions. Living compassionately with love for all other beings. There! That should be enough don't you think?

But I can already hear the doubt seeping into your mind: "Why should I be the only one considering my actions, why do I have to when no one else is?" But that is the individual mind talking. Once again you have to remember you are the world, and it is you. There is no "other."

Consider the consequences of each of your own actions, and let the world take care of itself. You do not need to worry about other people, they are unimportant here. Just you and the awareness that you are undivided from the whole, which is everything. So now, lay back and let the ripples of your good work affect the universe.

You may think it cannot be this easy, and that actually, you don't want to consider the consequences of your actions, but it's too late. You cannot stop considering them now. The thought is implanted. Your brain will wrestle with it and you may even come into conflict with yourself, but you can't stop now. You are changing the world. Imagine that!

Dear reader. A BIG thanks from all of us here. Yours sincerely, the inhabitants of planet earth.

[Back to Index](#)

Construction

1. *The commercial activity involved in repairing old structures or constructing new ones*

I never really pay much attention to new buildings going up, and I'm sure you don't either, unless the building work directly affect you. Wherever you look in cities, towns and the countryside there is construction work going on. Maybe it's a sign of "a strong economy," and maybe it's a sign that we are going to turn our beautiful land into an office/retail/residential complex. So as we begin our investigation together, try to reflect on the amount of construction currently going on in your city or country, and ask yourself what all this construction really means to us as a species.

Whilst in thailand a few years ago, I noticed that there were dozens of unfinished apartment buildings and office blocks towering above the skyline. "Why haven't they finished them?" I asked someone. I was informed that the stock market crash of several years previous had meant that there was no money to finish them, and so they stood empty, plastic sheeting flapping in the wind – abandoned. You see, to build things, you need money, or you at least need to be able to borrow it. When the money runs out, so the construction is just abandoned, waiting patiently for humans to finish it. But what I want to know is why we are so insistent about constantly building new things. Why bother in the first place? I decided to ask one of the well known construction firm bosses about it.

Me: Hello, my name is alan. I was hoping to ask you a few questions about the construction industry? Primarily I would like to know why you are constantly building! Haven't we got enough?

Boss: Hi alan, to answer your question: Absolutely not! With the rise in population and the continual growth of the economy, we need to keep ahead.

Me: So what you're saying is, we should keep building as much as we can?

Boss: No. We build to satisfy requirements and also to stimulate demand. For example we are building new apartments here in the city to encourage more people to live in the centre of the city.

Me: So does the city need more skyscrapers?

Boss: Well, where else are you going to put all the people who move into the city? There is no more space to build in the suburbs, so we have to go up.

Me: But doesn't this mean we will have to keep going up, and up, if the projected population increase happens as you say.

Boss: Well (laughing) the sky's the limit as they say. With modern building methods there isn't really a limit on how high we can go!

Me: But what do you think that does to the people, living so far away from the earth? Don't they become a little "disconnected"?

Boss: What? No, not at all, in fact people love it, (a) they get a great view from up there and (b) it gives them a sense of being "above" everyone else, if you know what I mean?

Me: I do. But surely there will come a time when you can't build anymore. I mean, even in a city there is only so much space?

Boss: True enough, but when that happens we can just demolish an old building and start again. Do you know how many apartments we can fit into a space reserved for only twenty houses? Hundreds. Maybe a thousand. It depends how high we are allowed to go.

Me: So the council does limit what you build?

Boss: Of course, there *are* regulations! But they know it's in the interest of all to keep building. We create new buildings. New companies come into the area bringing new capital investment with them which means more jobs for people here, which means they will have more money so they will be able to afford one of our nice new apartments we are building (laughing). Look, the economy needs the construction industry. We are the ones who create the towns and the cities. We are shaping the future.

Me: It seems to me that you are the ones responsible for creating the urban jungles we now see all over the world. You are the ones who are turning green open spaces into concrete wastelands.

Boss: Now wait a minute. We do no more than the people want. If people didn't want the office/retail/residential complexes, we would be out of a job.

Me: It seems that if people stopped "wanting" what you build many people would be out of a job.

Boss: That's true enough. Do you know how many people the construction industry directly and indirectly employs? Hundreds of thousands. Even when you exclude the number of people who work on site,

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

there are the people who provide the timber, and the nails, and the concrete, and the steel, and the glass, the fixings and the tools and machinery, and don't forget the people who provide the interiors, the plasterboard manufacturers, the flooring specialists, the toilet manufactures, the pipe work companies, the electrical cable companies, the lighting suppliers. And that's before anyone moves in. Then the interior needs to be furnished with desks, or beds, computers or kitchen units.

Me: I see.

Boss: You people who complain about the construction companies ruining the green spaces have no idea what you're talking about. If we didn't keep building or renovating, all of those people I mentioned previously would be out of a job, the economy would collapse, and then where would we be? If there were no new buildings the electricity, the gas, and the water suppliers would lose out because they need people to bill to make money and pay their staff! Telephones need to be connected. Internet needs to be connected. We make it possible for all these service companies to survive. Everyone is connected to the construction industry. *Everything* depends on construction!

Me: What a scary thought, but thanks for your time.

Boss: My pleasure.

So it seems from my conversation that we can't do without the construction industry. Well, not if we want to continue with the lifestyles we have become accustomed to. If all the construction companies stopped building for a year, can you see what the knock on effect would be? For the societies we have created it would spell disaster; millions of people would be out of work. There would be more widespread poverty than ever before. Social systems wouldn't be able to cope with the increased demand on their resources. Tax revenues would fall dangerously low. The banks would suffer. There could be rioting in the streets with people connected to the building industry demanding jobs be reinstated. There would be chaos! "So listen up everyone, we can't stop building until every inch of this planet is paved in concrete!" Imagine what would happen. It doesn't bear thinking about does it?

We must have progress

Imagine you live in a peaceful village for a moment. There is local agriculture, people live simply but comfortably, they have little money, but they don't need much; they grow as much as they need and trade with other communities for the things they don't have. They live as a community in balance with the land. "Yuk, a hippie commune," I hear you say "How horrible, I'd hate to live there!" But this is no hippie commune.

One day, in the fields nearby, they see large groups of people walking around with what look like plans for a new building. One member of the community approaches them and asks them what they are doing.

"We are hoping to build a new car plant here" they casually reply.

"What!? But you can't. This is greenbelt land. This is agricultural land, can you not see how beautiful it is, why do you want to spoil it?"

"We are not going to spoil it! We are going to be creating many jobs for local people, people like yourself. Around the plant we will build a nice park and lake that those who work here can enjoy."

"But there is already a park that people can enjoy; they can enjoy the natural beauty of the area!"

We don't need a new man-made one! What about the noise, and the pollution?" they demand.

"But think about the employment! People need to eat you know. You can't stop progress. If you've got any complaints you can register them with the council."

So the village community get together, and arrange to formally protest to the council in the hope of blocking the building permit. At the public meeting, there are many for, and against, the plans.

"This area needs more employment," shouts one. "We don't want to be poor; this is a great opportunity for us. If we don't let them build here, they will just go somewhere else. Why shouldn't we be the ones benefiting from the factory?"

Although, there are some who complain about the spoiling of the natural environment, the destruction of traditional village life and pollution, there are more who agree with the plans to build a new car plant.

"Imagine what it will do for the prosperity of the area," someone else says loudly. "We can't let a few

hippie protesters get in the way of progress.”

But a member of the village community blocking the plans stands up and says.

“First of all, we are not “hippies,” we are a community of people who just want to live in balance with nature and ourselves (people laugh). This so called progress you speak of, will bring about a complete change of life for all who live here, and not for the better. Sure, you may have some extra money in your pocket, but what will you have lost?”

“You’re just jealous!” someone shouts. “Just because you don’t want it doesn’t mean we shouldn’t have it.”

The council agrees.

The land is rezoned as “prime development land,” a fat cheque changes hands between the car company and the council. “Let the construction begin!” shouts the council leader at an official ceremony. The first sod of earth is dug. People cheer, smile for the cameras, and shake hands. Next day it is all over the local newspaper. Underneath the photo of smiling executives and councillors is carried the headline. “Car company welcomed to our town bringing much needed employment to the area.”

Change is good. They say

Next day, the diggers roll in to prepare the foundations of the new plant. Cranes arrive, and the steel structure is slowly erected. Months go by and the plant starts to tower over the old village.

“We need a new road, the old one isn’t going to be adequate to cope with all the increased traffic,” say the council.

Land is sequestered, and more machinery rolls in to build the road. In less than a year, the plant is nearly ready. Jobs are being filled and everyone is feeling confident. The village community is still complaining but their complaints are falling on the deaf ears of those who greedily await the opening. Slowly but surely, the community becomes divided.

“If you can’t beat them, join them,” voices one community member who has accepted a job at the plant. “I’ve got a new baby on the way, how am I supposed to pay for everything he needs?”

Soon the plant is ready, and it is officially opened by the head of the local council.

“This is a great day for us” he announces. “This is a new dawn for us, and we wish everyone every success.”

The employees start rolling in. 400 new jobs created, and most of them arrive by car. “We’re going to need a bigger car park,” thinks one of the bosses to himself. So they buy up more land from locals eager to cash in on this building bonanza.

Then a construction company director has an idea.

“Instead of people having to commute miles into the plant, we should build new homes for the employees, so they can walk to work. We could build a school and then more shops because the employees will need somewhere to spend their money after all!”

So it begins. More and more land is bought up, houses are packed in tightly, more access roads are built, the school goes up, a local hospital is built, and more businesses are attracted to the new towns economic prosperity. Soon the place is buzzing. What was once a community in the real sense of the word is taken over by greed. Restaurants and fast food joints are built to accommodate the workers who don’t have time to cook anymore, and a retail park with an electrical store, a computer store, clothing stores, and a home improvement store.

Most of the original “community” members have taken jobs in the surrounding businesses. After all, it’s a lot easier to make money there than it was in the community. Produce is no longer grown, it’s easier to buy it from the local supermarket, however many miles it has taken to get here. Simple lives are replaced by complex ones, fuelled by the need to keep working to maintain their new lifestyles.

“Now this is what I call a *real* community,” voices the construction boss.

Then one day the economy crashes. The car plant is moved to a country far, far away where the land costs and the labour costs are cheaper, and the town falls silent. “But how will we cope?” ask the townsfolk, but this time the business and community leaders have no idea. They have built themselves out of any connection with nature, and now all they are left with is buildings and debt. Even the “hippie” community

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

has no idea what to do. They have forgotten how they lived without all of this stuff, without all the money, and now they are left broke and unhappy. How can they reclaim the life they used to know? Do you know?

“I know, proclaims the construction boss. We have to build more; we have to create more demand. We have to attract new capital investment. This is going to be great! I see a wonderful future in front.....”

What will you do for money? Anything?

[Back to Index](#)

Consumerism

1. *The theory that an increasing consumption of goods is economically beneficial*

When I first sat down to think about the rise of the consumer in modern life, I thought I would be writing how bad consumerism was for us as a planet, but the more I looked at myself, the more I realised how much I was affected by it, and indeed, how much easier it had made my life. So just in case you think I'm going to spend this whole dialogue complaining that consumerism is a terrible evil, don't worry, I'm not.

In fact, as I walked through an "upmarket" shopping complex yesterday, I have to say that it was actually a nice experience. It was warm, well lit, with shiny floors, and soft music. There were many different shops, selling everything from jewellery to jeans; from dvd's to televisions. All available to take away right there and then. And as I sat down to drink my fair-trade soy latte, I looked around me, and thought to myself: "Even if you think 'consumerism' is bad you have to hand it to the human race. In a short time we have managed to create so much from nothing."

Thanks to our inventiveness, there is such a thing as a television, waterproof clothing, even food pre-packed and ready to eat. We have invented so many things, and at the same time made them available to the masses. Granted you need money to buy these things, but nonetheless, they are readily available. There may be a cost to all of this, but let us explore that in another topic. For now, let us just celebrate human achievement.

Before the industrial revolution, little more than 200 years ago, all of this would be unthinkable. The ability to go to nice looking shops, and buy everything you could possibly want, would have been impossible. Even the rich wouldn't have been able to do it. Not because they didn't have enough money, but because there were no means to make these products.

Since the start of the industrial revolution, we have gradually been able to make more and more types of products, all invented by humans to make our lives better and easier. Some of the products have made our lives so much easier, such as the washing machine, which saves having to stand over a basin for hours scrubbing clothes; so before we condemn the purchase of consumer products, let's take a balanced view of this for a moment, and think what the consumer revolution has done for us.

Think of the products you buy for personal hygiene, like shower gel, nail clippers, shampoo, soap, and tampons; and what about kitchenware products such as a cheese grater, or hand blender, pots, and pans? Not forgetting cleaning cloths, antibacterial sprays, washing powder, floor mops, and vacuum cleaners; and have you all forgotten the flushing toilet? That's a consumer product too, you know! Beds, duvets, sleeping bags, tents, carpets, rugs, vases, tables, chairs, shoes... These are all consumer products, whether you like it or not.

Even the "hippie," who wants to live in nature, still has clothes, something to cook on, like a gas stove, pots, pans, knives, and forks; and sleeps in a man-made tent – all consumer products, made in factories, for the benefit of everyone else.

**

Let's say you decided to go back to nature; that you decided to give up the life of the consumer; that you made your own clothes out of wool you spun yourself; that you lived in a forest, and made your own shelter (and tools to make the shelter, if you please); that you grew all your own food, dug your own toilet, found your own water, and washed your clothes in a stream... Would you be happier? Would you feel free like the animals and the birds, or would it just be a fairly miserable experience? If you lived in a warm tropical country it may be quite nice, but you would definitely not enjoy it in a winter in russia!

So for anyone considering a "back to nature" lifestyle, make sure you enjoy working. Hard. Every day. No holidays abroad, no restaurant meals, no going to the cinema, or appreciating the arts; just working to live. Full stop. That is the life most people in the developing world experience, and I can assure you that most of them would swap their lives for ours. So before you think about living in nature, think about what you couldn't be without. I am not talking about satellite television, bars, and computer games; I am talking about clean drinking water, after all, water is a consumer product, in the same way fridges (which stop food from rotting), and work surfaces (which are easy to clean thereby stopping the spread of bacteria), are consumer products – all products that make life better and more sanitary, thereby stopping the spread of disease.

So consumerism is not just about flat screen tv's, burgers, cola drinks, and fashion clothing; it's about buying products and services which actively benefit the human race.

I, consumer

Today, I write this topic on a consumer laptop, wear consumer shoes, socks, boxer shorts, and t-shirt, sit in a consumer library using consumer electricity, to power my consumer laptop; sit at a consumer desk, on a consumer chair, and drink consumer water from the tap. I will have a consumer lunch, drive my consumer car, and enjoy an evening in my consumer home. Whether we truly need all of these products is another matter!

I could go back to living like my ancestors, but what would be the point of that? Inventions to help us, the consumer, have allowed people like me to sit and write books like this! If I was living in nature, would I have time to think deeply or would I be more concerned with my crops? Even if I did have the time to write, where would I get the paper to write it on, and who would get the book published and printed?

The consumer life has benefited me greatly, and I thank all the people who have gone before me for dedicating their lives to inventing things to help the human race live a little more easily in this world. They have used their big brains to create something new; something that cannot be said for any other species on the planet. They just carry on doing the same thing they have always been doing; looking for food and procreating.

We have come so far in the last 300 years. We have discovered some wonderful things, and we have invented some wonderful products. Thanks to the inventions of some great minds, we can now leave the earth in a consumer jet plane, being served food and drink, and watching films at 35,000 feet! If you think of the number of inventions that have allowed that experience to happen you will be amazed. Here are just some of them:

1. The design of a wing that generates lift.
2. The mining and manufacture of metals, to enclose the plane.
3. The discovery of oil, which can be processed into petroleum to create fuel.
4. The design of an engine, to get the plane off the ground.
5. The design of rudders, ailerons, and flaps, to help the plane turn.
6. The invention of electronics.
7. The manufacture of textiles, for carpets and seat covers.
8. The invention of television and data storage, for playback on demand.
9. The invention of satellites, to help the plane navigate.
10. The invention of the wheel and manufacture of rubber for the tyres to help the plane move on the ground, and land safely.
11. The invention of hydraulic systems to move parts of the plane remotely.
12. The invention of plastics for various items, including windows.
13. The invention of knives and forks.
14. The mass production of food.
15. The invention of fridges, freezers, and ovens to store and heat food.
16. The invention of radios, to allow communications between aircraft and the ground.
17. The invention of a pressurisation and oxygen system, that allows us to breath comfortably six miles above the earth, at temperatures of minus sixty degrees.

The plane is the ultimate consumer product. We do not actually need one to live, but how much easier has it made life? Some of you may remember that even quite recently, a trip to australia would have taken six weeks by boat. Now we can make it from the uk in less than twenty four hours, in complete comfort, knowing we will almost certainly arrive safely. Hundreds of millions of us move around the earth this way every year. How many of you would like to swap lives with your ancestors, or indeed any person who has to work the land every day just for survival? I know the family struggling to feed themselves in some remote village in africa would like to swap with us!

Some of us in the west may see consumerism as a waste of resources, but there are billions of poor who want to experience the benefits. Sometimes it is only through experience that you can see what is truly important in life.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Deep down, I believe that many of these products are unnecessary parts of the human experience, created to keep us superficially happy, but most of us are not at such a point in our development that we can live in total simplicity, aware in the moment, using our minds creatively to understand more than just the visual world. Most of us still need the pleasures that mass consumerism gives us, including myself.

I have seen people from poor countries marvel at being able to talk to someone on a mobile phone, or being able to buy food from a supermarket, and we have to admit to ourselves that it is wonderful. The man who has nothing isn't interested in my opinion that mass food production and world distribution isn't helping the planet, or that mobile phones are an addictive waste of time and energy used by people to occupy their minds when they are bored. He sees each of these things as a positive step forward. Something better than he had.

Who am I to tell him that supermarkets and mobile phones are bad, when he sees millions of people enjoying them? Who am I to tell anyone that mass consumerism is bad? If someone was to tell me that buying clothes from Shop X was bad, would I listen? Yesterday I bought clothes and had coffee. Was it "bad" I did that? I am aware that people are working for next to nothing in terrible conditions in far away coffee plantations and textile factories, but did it stop me buying the products? No, it did not. I wanted a coffee and I bought it. I wanted a new t-shirt because my old ones look terrible, and I bought it.

An ethical dilemma

These are real dilemmas I have faced since embarking on my journey.

I need a new pair of shoes as my old ones are falling apart. I go to the shopping centre, because that is where the shoes are sold. I can only afford a cheap pair of shoes, as I choose to do work that benefits others, which is rather poorly paid. I do not wear leather, and I want to make sure that the shoes I buy are made by someone who is getting well paid for their work. I see a pair of shoes I like at a reasonable price I can afford, but am unsure as to the conditions the workers face in the factory. Do I (a) buy the shoes anyway, as I am now getting wet feet as my shoes are in such bad condition or (b) wait until I find a company that can guarantee that the workers are being treated well, no animal has suffered in the manufacture of the product, and the company is not adversely affecting the environment with their manufacturing processes?

I am hungry. I am away from home. I cannot find anywhere that serves food that is "strict" vegetarian (i.e. contains no dairy as well as meat), but find a shop that sells a takeaway vegetable pastry. I am pretty sure that the pastry has butter in it, and that the vegetables have a cheese sauce. Do I (a) buy it, as I am hungry, even though it conflicts with my ethics (*motivation based on ideas of right and wrong*), on dairy free products, and is wasteful to our resources because of packaging, or do I (b) wait until I get home, even though I will not be able to eat for another six hours?

I want to go on a trip abroad. I cannot travel there by train, as it costs too much, and I have to cross water too. The trip is very important to me in my research for a book, but I understand that flying creates a lot of pollution and uses up precious resources such as oil. Should I (a) go on the trip because it is vitally important to me, or (b) decide not to travel?

Every minute of every day, I am confronted by dilemmas such as these. This is one of the problems of living your life in awareness, knowing that everything is interconnected. So what do I do? I am aware that most products that are made in life come at a cost; either human, animal, or environmental.

I try to make myself aware of companies who have a compassionate outlook on life, who try to minimize the impact products have; but these companies are few and far between. Most companies are interested in getting the products out to the consumers in the cheapest possible way which usually means that someone is going to be paying that cost. Either in the form of bad working conditions, animal mistreatment, or inconsiderate use of the planet's resources.

My cheap shoes (yes, I did buy them), came at a cost. They were manufactured in china, by workers who live under an oppressive regime, are paid measly wages, by a company that is only interested in making

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

money, and shipped thousands of miles using fuel which is a limited resource. My pastry came at a cost. It did contain butter, meaning that animals suffered for my hunger, and was wrapped in plastic which could not be recycled.

I did take the flight, meaning that pollution was caused by the aeroplane which also used large amounts of petroleum, which is a limited resource.

Do I feel guilty about these things? In a word yes; but if I was to wait until each company had satisfied my strict ethics I would be waiting a long time.

So what do you do when you want to make a difference in the world, but most other people don't care? Do you live as a hermit, relying on the basic resources our ancestors had available, or do you live in the world as it is, and try to make a difference from where you find yourself? Nothing in this life is perfect, and it is only through education and awareness that people will start to live more ethically. Not by rejection of all that surrounds us. Trying to live the "perfect" life has nearly driven me mad! I live in a consumer society and I have to do the best I can whilst living here.

I am sure that most companies do not think they are behaving unethically when they produce consumer goods. They provide employment for people, who may not otherwise have any, manufacture goods that make people's lives easier, and generate money, that goes back into they world in the form of taxes that can help to build hospitals and schools. They certainly have a strong argument to keep doing what they're doing.

The problem is, that businesses fail to consider the impact their actions will have on the world as a whole, and the consumers never see the negative impact. They just see the end product they really want, but it really is quite simple. They are both just lacking insight. They do not realise that the world is interconnected, and as such focus only on one small part of it. The part that affects "me." My needs. My fridge. My tv. My profits. So how do we escape this cycle that will ultimately create misery for us all? It would be easy to say: "just stop buying stuff!" But I am acutely aware that a few words from me will not stop people wanting things that make them happy; so for now, let's just ask some simple questions when making or buying products.

Consumers:

- A. Is the product I am buying from a country where the people are oppressed politically, or are made to work in conditions I would refuse to work in?
- B. Could I have bought this product locally, which would have provided local employment, and cut down on packaging, and other transportation costs?
- C. Does the company have an ethics policy with regard to the employees and the environment?
- D. Are animals suffering because of the products I am buying?
- E. Am I buying this because I need it, or because I just want to impress other people?
- F. Could I make do with what I have?

Companies:

- A. Is profit my only motivation and goal?
- B. Have I considered the human, animal, and environmental costs associated with manufacture?
- C. Do people really need what I am making, or is there a product I could make that would have a positive impact on humanity whilst still providing employment?
- D. Do I have an ethics policy that is attached to each product so that consumers can make up their own minds on whether to buy it or not?

Would I have bought my shoes if they came with the following information attached?

Casual sports shoes: £29.99

Origin: China. Run by an oppressive military regime

Human cost: Workers paid £1.00 per day and forced to work minimum 12 hours a day

Animal cost: One cow died to make the suede uppers

Environmental cost: Paper packaging, fuel for transport to dock, fuel for ship, fuel for lorry to take to distribution point, fuel to take products to shop

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

If I did buy them it would be my choice, but at least I would be more aware of the real costs.

It is time we started taking responsibility for our lifestyles and the products we surround ourselves with. At the same time, companies have to take responsibility for the products they manufacture, and can no longer just get away with whimsically using up the planet and making animals and people suffer all in the name of employment.

We, the consumers and the manufacturers, are intertwined in a real relationship, with costs that are way too high, if we are going to live in any kind of balance with each other, and the planet we inhabit. We cannot just buy or sell products without total awareness of the global costs. It's time to become aware, right now.

[Back to Index](#)

Control

1. *Power to direct or determine*
2. *A relation of constraint of one entity (thing or person or group) by another*

We all know people who exhibit great self-control. Whilst we consistently fail to control our impulses in certain departments, they take great pride in going to bed early; abstaining from intoxicating substances or stimulants; get up early every morning, and go for a walk before we are even awake, and we wonder how they do it! How can they be so controlled in life? Well that's what we are here to find out, so let us begin.

I don't know about you, but most people get impulses at some time or other to do something out of character; but although they think about it, they rarely act on these impulses. It is just imagination. But what would happen if you did let go? What would you do if there were no consequences for acting on impulses, no law to say you couldn't do anything? What would you do?

Would you want to smash something? Would you take a sledgehammer and start smashing your house up? Maybe you would take a sledgehammer and smash someone's head in? How about running down to the nearest brothel and have sex with as many prostitutes as possible, or doing some cocaine or heroin? What do you think? Don't worry, there are no consequences, you can act on any impulse you like! Maybe you'd go to the bank and make a "withdrawal" using a gun as your withdrawal slip? Remember it's your choice. For today only, you call the shots.

So have you decided what you would like to do? How about bombing an entire race of people you don't like? One thing's for sure, once people let go of self-control it's probably going to start getting messy out there as most people don't want to go and save a million starving children on impulse.

Impulse

1. *An instinctive motive*
2. *A sudden desire*

Occasionally, we all do things on impulse. We might just decide to get on a plane and see our child who lives abroad, or we might phone an old friend we haven't spoken to for years. We may even just decide to quit our job; but these are all harmless impulses. Even deciding to go out and get drunk on impulse is going to give you no more than a rather large hangover. No, we are talking about bigger things here. We are talking about Man letting go of all self-control, and carrying out his wildest fantasies. Things he knows maybe wrong, but he just can't help himself doing.

I wonder how many crimes have been carried out, not in premeditation, but just by someone acting on impulse? I imagine a lot. "I didn't mean to kill her, I don't know what I was thinking; I just took the knife and I stabbed her." But remember today's the day when impulse is king! You can do anything you want; have you decided what it will be yet?

As I've been writing this I know what mine will be. I want to smash up the house. That would be great I think! Just to take a sledgehammer and break everything into tiny pieces with no thoughts for the consequences. After four years of writing, it will sure come as a relief! But we won't do these things will we? We will exercise self-control, and the impulses will only ever get as far as our imagination. Thank goodness.

But one thing troubles me. If we have to use self-control, then what does that say about our natural self? Are we saying we would really like to do these things, just if (a) no one was looking, and (b) we could get away with it? Let's go into this more deeply shall we?

Are we saying that Man would act on all his impulses if he didn't control himself? Quite possibly. So what we need to find out is whether this self-control is a natural mechanism, or one concocted by the society to stop chaos setting in.

Imagine now, that a lion is sitting relaxing in the sun, when suddenly he gets the impulse to kill his entire family. Do you think that could happen? Now I don't know a lot about the animal kingdom, but I've never read about or seen this kind of behaviour. Maybe an elephant suddenly has an impulse to destroy all the trees in the forest and then set about killing his children! Ever heard of it happening? What about our trusted friend in life, the dog? Ah now that's a different story!

Man's best friend *has* been known to act on his impulses. In fact, as I found out on many occasions, my

labrador exhibited little self-control sometimes. Normally he would happily stay on his own if I was out, but sometimes I would come home and walk through the door, and think “Oh my god...” and just look around at the destruction he had caused. He would have eaten as much as he could from cupboards he could reach, torn the sofa cushions into pieces, chewed the wall, eaten the backs of several shoes and shredded magazines and perhaps even eaten some of his own bed.

He had literally gone on a rampage (*act violently, recklessly, or destructively*), and if he was a human, he could have been arrested and sent to court for destroying my house, but a dog he was, out of the reach of the law; so with a stern warning *never* to do it again, the house returned to normal, and I went off to work every day with chewed shoes. Maybe animal psychologists would say he was bored and frustrated, but it is funny that he is so close to Man, and yet Man himself has these urges too. Just a coincidence perhaps?

How many times have we seen crowds that have gone on a rampage? It's normally during some demonstration where the tension builds and builds, and then magically, some people just let themselves go, and start smashing shops and cars; setting fire to things, and stealing goods from shops. It's usually what would be termed a riot (*a public act of violence by an unruly mob, a public act of violence by an unruly mob*), and aggressively put down by the law enforcement agencies. You see, it is against the law to act in this way; just imagine what would happen to the economy of the country and to society as a whole, if everyone was engaged in acting on impulse because that's what it is.

Everyone must learn self-discipline!

Any monk will tell you that. They will say we must control ourselves and our natural urges if we are to achieve enlightenment. So, they go to bed early, and get up at dawn every day to do their meditation practice, or prayer. They do not engage in sexual activity (become celibate), eat simple meals, live in a simple room, and they abstain from alcohol and drugs. It might not be everyone's idea of fun, but I've tried it during a short stay at a buddhist community, and enjoyed it. There was something calming about the routine and the (imposed) self-discipline that freed the mind from the destructive influence of modern life.

“They were going back to basics,” I thought to myself. “Self-discipline is all about going back to our more natural state, that's why it feels good.” But the longer I spent there, and the more I talked to some of the long term residents of the community, the more I realised that there was nothing natural about self-discipline at all. It was all about control.

I needed to find out more, so I spoke to one of the long term residents on the island whom I believe was a monk for a period of time. I asked him why he was there on the island:

“I'm here because I want to be of service to others,” he replied in a bit too text book fashion for my liking.

“But how did you get to be living here in the first place?” I probed.

“I used to be a heroin addict, alan, and this place saved me.”

The community was on an island, with no alcohol, cigarettes or drugs allowed and only several small ferries a day to take us to the main island; but I found out from other people that he chose to stay on the island most of the time just in case he went to the pub or started smoking or taking drugs. I noticed that any time he was off the island, he quickly lit a cigarette and puffed heavily on it! No harm there; but all this talk of self-discipline was starting to disturb me, and I started to gain a bit more insight.

There was also an older man on the island, who spent his time there away from the other residents, didn't join in with meals, and led a separate existence in a room above what could only be described as a shed. “Oh, he's nearly a yogi (*one who practices yoga and has achieved a high level of spiritual insight*) alan,” they told me.

He spent most of his time working silently in the garden, doing his meditations with his beads, and didn't shower regularly. “Here is a man truly on a path to enlightenment,” I thought to myself, “a man trying to free his mind and body from the miserable existence of human life.” But then one day, something changed in my thinking about him.

“Where are you off to today?” I asked him as we were catching the ferry to the main island.

“I've got a few things to do in town, then I'm off for a couple of swifties in the pub!”

“Oh!” I said, trying not to sound too shocked.

A swift is slang for a quick drink, in case you didn't know. I just couldn't understand it. Here was a man, dedicated to the path, "*almost a yogi*" as someone had said, someone who was denying himself all that western society took for granted, now off to the pub for a few drinks! What was going on? The more I got to know him, the more I realised that he actually went for a "swift" quite a lot. Surely alcohol doesn't help one reach enlightenment? But I never said anything to him.

He was obviously serious about his yoga and meditation, and equally serious about alcohol, (well, he did seem to enjoy it). But why was he denying himself the pleasure he probably wanted? What was all this self-discipline about if he was shooting over to the pub on regular occasions?

As time went on, I spoke to many people on the island and it was becoming increasingly clear that a few had had some serious drug or alcohol problems on the mainland in the past. Well, if they didn't, they did like to talk about it a lot! It suddenly seemed that this self-discipline was a way of protecting themselves from their own impulses. They were isolating themselves from everybody else and the substances that had caused them problems, and were engaged in the act of denying themselves, to save them from themselves.

O, lord (or anyone) please protect me from myself

When we put ourselves in a self-imposed exile to protect ourselves from our impulses (which come from ourselves), does that mean the impulses will eventually go away? I guess that's what people who become monks hope! They hope that by denying the body and mind pleasure they will eventually free themselves from it.

Some people are very disciplined, and they are not monks, nor do they have addiction problems. So why do they do it? What are they trying to achieve or more to the point what are they trying to escape from? You see, self-discipline is not a natural state; it is an imposed state that "we" impose on ourselves. But who are "we" and who are we imposing it on? Do you see the point of the question? We are saying we must be disciplined in order to free ourselves, but who is talking here; is it not us? What we need to find is our natural state, not practice rituals to keep us from acting on impulses.

It is time we asked ourselves what is going on, so it is time to open up another dialogue; one in which we can truly find out if Man naturally wants to smash things, or people, or take drugs; or whether these urges are created by frustration and conflict in the mind, caused primarily by the society we have created? Let's start.

Me: Hi there mind, me again, I've got a couple of questions I'd like answered!

Mind: Oh, you again, ok, go on!

Me: Why is it that we try to become self-disciplined all the time are we afraid of ourselves?

Mind: Why would you be afraid of yourself?

Me: Because sometimes we have these urges to do things we know can't be in the best interest of our system or society.

Mind: So why do you have them?

Me: That's what I'm here to find out!

Mind: What urges do you have?

Me: Well, they're kind of primeval I guess, you know, wanting to have lots of sex with lots of people.

Mind: And why is that a problem?

Me: Because I shouldn't do it. I shouldn't even be thinking about it, it's wrong.

Mind: Why is it wrong?

Me: Because I am in a relationship.

Mind: But these are your urges.

Me: But I don't want them. I want them to stop.

Mind: So stop then

Me: But I can't, it's like there is a force behind me driving me to have them, but it's not me.

Mind: Who are you?

Me: I am me.

Mind: Who am I?

Me: You are me also

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Mind: So if we are one then it is you who is causing these urges to surface, through will and desire.

Me: But how do I stop them?

Mind: Why do you want to stop them?

Me: Because they are wrong.

Mind: I know they are, because my parents told me and it is not acceptable to go off having sex with anyone you like when you are in a relationship.

Me: Isn't it?

Mind: You tell me.

Me: You tell me.

Mind: Look, we are one – stop dividing us all the time

Me: But who's answering these questions?

Mind: You are.

Me: But you said, you are, doesn't that mean you are something different?

Mind: We've had this conversation before. When division is ended, there will be no more conflict.

Me: But I am in conflict. There are things I have impulses to do, but I know that in order to keep living in society I must control them.

Mind: Who says?

Me: I say, and society says.

Mind: But you just said you have the impulses, and you have also said you are the one in control. That, my friend is division, can you not see it?

Me: Well, sort of it, but I just want them to stop.

Mind: So stop.

Me: But I can't. I do notice that there is two of me here one wanting one thing and one wanting the other.

Mind: So which one of you wants to stop having these impulses?

Me: The real me. Or at least the one who was brought up in this society.

Mind: And who is the other?

Me: The other is my animal self, the one that existed before.

Mind: But you are all animal.

Me: No, I mean my higher brain.

Mind: Ah you mean the one that was educated by your parents and conditioned by society is that the brain you are talking about?

Me: Yes, I guess. But it's very frustrating! On the one hand I would like to go out and have relationships with many women but there is a voice telling me I shouldn't do it. Is that my voice of conscience?

Mind: Is having a conscience a natural state?

Me: I guess it is. It is the voice that intrinsically knows right from wrong.

Mind: How do you know?

Me: Well I think it is, or perhaps my conscience is just a database of what society told me I can and can't do.

Mind: Perhaps.

Me: But that means that my conscience may not be real. It may be just a program that was installed by my parents and teachers amongst others.

Mind: And?

Me: And that my real state is the animal state, and so these urges are natural.

Mind: Perhaps, but do animals have these urges?

Me: Yes they do.

Mind: So what's the problem then?

Me: Well it's society, they don't want me to have these impulses, they want me to control myself, to conform otherwise it becomes harmful to the society.

Mind: Exactly.

Me: So does that mean I can go out and have relationships with lots of women? My girlfriend wouldn't be very pleased!

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

- Mind:** But that is your conscience, which is society talking, not you.
- Me:** I understand. But if we all acted on our impulses then society would collapse.
- Mind:** Quite possibly, but then we would really see what man is made of wouldn't we?
- Me:** I guess. We would probably find out that he is an animal, just like all others, except he has been brainwashed into thinking he is something else. And the powerful people who have conditioned him want to make sure he never finds the natural state. But wait a minute, what about people that are addicted to things and they want to get rid of the addiction. Surely that isn't society that caused it?
- Mind:** Well who invented the addictive substances?
- Me:** True. But what about people who have to imprison themselves physically or psychologically to stop acting on impulses?
- Mind:** You create the impulse.
- Me:** True enough, but...
- Mind:** Listen, we all have impulses to do things, but when we get them we compare them to the database to see if they are acceptable to society. If they are, we do them. If they aren't, we come into conflict with ourselves and we feel frustrated we can't act on them.
- Me:** So what you are saying is, if society finds it acceptable, we do it, but what if society doesn't approve, and we do it anyway? What then?
- Mind:** We come into conflict with society.
- Me:** But this isn't helping. I want to know why we self-discipline ourselves.
- Mind:** Because we want to stop the urges, we want to end conflict within ourselves and make sure we don't come into conflict with society.
- Me:** But aren't the urges still there?
- Mind:** Self-discipline is a control mechanism. Just like discipline in the school, the home or in the wider society is.
- Me:** So this is all about control?
- Mind:** Of course. We control what we don't want to see. But these impulses are part of us.
- Me:** But what if I want to kill someone, what stops me?
- Mind:** Your conscience, which society created, is normally enough, as the threat of prison or execution stops you from acting on impulse. But sometimes the impulse is so strong you will do it anyway.
- Me:** So if I am a murderer, do I have to practice self-discipline to stop me getting urges to kill people?
- Mind:** If you are in conflict, yes. But once conflict is resolved there will be no more urges
- Me:** So how do I get rid of conflict?
- Mind:** By accepting wholeness.
- Me:** That's easy for you to say, but we have to live in the society, it's not enough. Surely we must abstain from earthly pleasures in order to see the path.
- Mind:** What path? All we are doing is talking about conflict. Conflict that is in you. Conflict between what you would like to do, and what society tells you you can or can't do. That's all.
- Me:** But I'm still not clear.
- Mind:** Listen. You and I are one right? We want to do things, and we compare them with what is right and wrong on our database, and if the database, which is conscience, created by society tells us it is wrong, we don't do it, but we feel frustrated and full of conflict. When we see that there is no right and wrong, only insight, we can start getting somewhere.
- Me:** I still don't understand.
- Mind:** If you want to do something, then do it. If you want to get drunk, then get drunk. If you want to kill someone, then kill them. If you want to keep taking drugs then keep taking them. And if you want to go out and have sex with a hundred women then do it! Do you understand? And don't chastise yourself for doing it; after all, it was a conscious choice. You are whole, there are no hidden urges once you can see that. Only your choice. The only thing you have to be aware of is the consequences.
- Me:** So can self-discipline quieten my mind; can it stop conflict?
- Mind:** Well, it can keep it at bay, until such time as the conflict and the frustration become too much to bear, then you must either act on your urges or control them further. Only through awareness,

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

comes the insight necessary to end the conflict.

Me: So are urges wrong?

Mind: For who?

Me: I don't know.

Mind: There is no right and wrong, only consequences, so you will have to weigh up your urges vs. the consequences. But conditioning by society always pokes it's head into your arguments. You have to see where society stops and you start.

Me: But am I not society?

Mind: Yes, you are a part of it. But we are talking about the conditioning by society, which is your parents, your teachers, media etc.

Me: So how do I know what is right and wrong? If you say I am an animal then surely it is ok for me to go out and kill a man or smash things up or steal.

Mind: Do the animals do that?

Me: Ah! I see what your saying. Animals don't kill their own species and they have nothing to smash up, but they might steal some food.

Mind: Who's food is it? Is there an owner in the natural world?

Me: But look, I understand lots of what you are saying but that still doesn't answer my question. If I stop controlling myself, will I become a crazed madman?

Mind: Why would you? Are the animals crazy? Do they exert self discipline and control on themselves?

Me: I guess not. But it feels like I must control myself.

Mind: That is society talking, not you.

Me: Ok, so how do I stop myself from smashing the place up and killing people, if I have no self-control?

Mind: Do you love all men like your brother? Do you have compassion for the suffering of every living thing on this planet?

Me: I guess I do, I think.

Mind: Then you need no self-control, nor self-discipline. Will getting up at 5.00 am every morning help you love?

Me: No.

Mind: Will eating one bowl of rice a day, or sitting in the lotus position help you become more compassionate?

Me: No.

Mind: So what is the answer?

Me: I am love. I am compassion.

Mind: So where is the conflict?

Me: There is none.

Mind: You just think you need self-discipline because you are afraid of what you will do if you don't control yourself.

Me: I see. When I am love and compassion I have no need for self-control.

Mind: Exactly.

Me: But just one more question...

Mind: You're on your own now. Be the love, be the compassion, don't force yourself into self-discipline; it is just another way for us to divide ourselves more.

Me: But what about my dog? How could I have stopped him from eating the furniture and my shoes etc.

Mind: He wanted to do it, so he did it. He knew the consequences. Maybe in the future try not locking up an animal all day on his own away from his natural environment. How would you like it? Oh I forgot you *are* out of your natural environment. Maybe that was the answer all along...

[Back to Index](#)

Conversation

1. *The use of speech for informal exchange of views or ideas or information etc.*

Have you ever stopped to think what you really talk about in a conversation? I'd just like to remind you, before we begin our discussion, that we are the most intelligent species on the planet. We're the one characterized by superior intelligence, and articulate speech.

We all talk about a million different things in the day, in a thousand different languages, in hundreds of different countries; but I'm sure you would agree that we are not all super-intellectuals able to discuss the future of mankind; the problem of global warming, healthcare, poverty, and starvation in the third world. Social policy, healthcare, peace, violence terror in the community, guns and global warfare may also be topics we are unable to discuss. Why not? It's our planet!

So what do we all talk about then? Let's look at a couple after a hard day at work:

- How was your day at work?
- Oh, fine...
- Busy?
- Not too bad.
- Dinner will be ready in ten minutes.
- Great, how was your day?"
- Oh fine. I went shopping after work."
- Is there anything good on tv tonight?"
- I'm not sure."

How about the conversation between two friends having a drink?

- Well, what's he like?
- Oh, he's really nice.
- What does he do?
- He works in marketing.
- Ooh, has he got a nice car?
- Yes it's brand new, it's really nice.

How about the sports fans?

- Did you see that goal?
- Yeah, it was amazing.
- But the other guy should have been sent off."
- How about the reality show fans?
- I can't believe she got voted off!
- Yeah, I was sure she was going to win.
- I don't like that other guy.
- No I don't either.
- I hope he gets voted off next week.
- Yeah, so do I.

How about the news experts?

- Did you see what's happening over there?"
- Yeah, the prime minister should send in more troops."
- Do you think?"
- Absolutely; if we have more fire-power over there, the war would over much sooner."

How about the justice experts?

- They should lock him up and throw away the key."
- I agree, I think they should bring back capital punishment."
- That would definitely be a deterrent."
- It's what the country needs."

We all have conversations: With friends, with colleagues, and family members. We discuss every topic from

the weather to the state of the political situation in the middle east. Sometimes we have conversations just to pass the time or to be polite, and sometimes we have opinions which we are eager to share with someone else. More often than not, they are just comments passed on what someone else has said; that we happen to agree or disagree with.

Intellectual

1. A person who uses the mind creatively

The problem when one talks about having an intellectual conversation, is that often it is perceived to be boring. But tell me, which is more boring; a conversation about life, or a conversation about who's going to be voted off the latest reality show? When I talk about life, I am not talking about something profound. Life is all around us. The people we meet, the places we see, the things we do.

We all have the ability to use the mind creatively, yet how many of us do it?

We go to school to learn. We learn about history, mathematics, art, science, and politics. We learn how to speak a different language, as well as understand literature from our own country. We talk about field trips we've been on, we act in plays, and I'm not talking about university education; this is your average high school education. Why did they teach you about all these things? Because they are all part of life. Geography, geology, sociology, chemistry, and physics are *not* abstract subjects, they're what makes up the world we live in. Yet how many of us remember anything about them? We finish school and get a job – glad to leave the structure of class work, and get into the business of earning money.

So many people go to university to learn at a higher level, to discuss complex topics, yet they too fall into the employment trap when they leave. Not that getting a job is a bad thing; it's all too necessary if you want to eat and pay your bills; it's just that the capacity for discussion of anything but the most mundane becomes so distant, and unimportant. Think about it. Topics of discussion now fit in around work; after all, that's what you do for at least eight to nine hours a day.

Depending on the job you have, your conversations may be about how to increase turnover, how to solve a particular scientific problem, how to lift a large piece of sheet glass fifty metres into the air; or if you work in a job such as production line, retail or hospitality for example, you may have to wait until your break to discuss anything with colleagues.

When talking with your colleagues, you generally have discussions that, if not totally relating to work, revolve around topics that a person of your status in the society may be expected to discuss. For example, a managing director, talking to his equal (employment status only) may be expected to discuss economic trends, the budget, and corporate taxation; whereas the manual worker, may be expected to talk about an article he read in a tabloid newspaper, or a comment he heard down the pub.

I am not trying to stereotype anyone, but people fall into stereotypical categories by virtue of their status in society. A manual worker, doing a repetitive task at work, would not be expected to read a broadsheet business section, or a magazine on economics, any more than a managing director would be expected to read a tabloid newspaper. In fact it would be positively frowned upon, and the person committing the offence may find themselves the subject of ridicule.

“Who does he think he is reading the business section? He's getting a bit above himself if you ask me. Does he think he's better than us? Well he's not, he's just the same.”

You are expected to conform to your status level, not to drop below or to go above it – intellectually that is. It has nothing to do with money. A titled gentleman, who gambled away his money on alcohol and prostitutes, would still read the business and world politics section, in the same way the builder who made a lot of money may still read the tabloid newspapers, because he believes that is his intellectual level.

Some of you may think I am making sweeping generalisations that are not true, but I think the choice of newspaper still says something about a person's expectation of their intellectual status. See for yourselves; look in the builders vans, the manual workers tea room in the factory, check the directors offices! See what newspapers the higher managers are reading. I have spent many years working in and around factories and it

seems to go like this.

Manual worker	–	Tabloid
Supervisor	–	Tabloid
Junior manager	–	Tabloid
Middle manager	–	Broadsheet
Senior manager	–	Broadsheet
Director	–	Broadsheet

Is this just a coincidence? Are people merely conforming to what they believe is expected of them intellectually, or is the manual worker really interested in the latest celebrity drug scandal? I for one always bought the broadsheet *and* the tabloids when I was young. The broadsheet to maintain intellectual appearance, and the tabloid for meaningless gossip that filled twenty minutes whilst eating my sandwiches at lunchtime!

It seems that people with a high intellectual status expectation can happily read material that is “below” them, but not the other way round. No one would look twice at the director glancing through the tabloid for a bit of harmless fun, but a manual worker could not get away with reading a broadsheet in front of their peers.

Let me ask you another question: Do window cleaners read the financial broadsheets? “Of course not,” say you, “if they were intelligent enough to read the financial broadsheets, they wouldn’t be window cleaners!”

**

We all learned similar things when we were growing up, you and I; some had better teachers, some worse. We learned about the planet, the history, the animals, and the birds. We learned some science, we learned how to count, and read and most importantly, we all learned to speak.

Speaking is natural; we can all do it from a few years old. We hear our parents speaking and we copy it. We learn to copy the way they express themselves, we develop the same accent they have, we copy their phraseology (*the manner in which something is expressed in words*), and as we get older, we begin to read what they’re reading, and listen to what they’re discussing.

Discussion

1. An extended communication (often interactive) dealing with some particular topic

Some of us did better at school than others. I went to a good school, but never really achieved what was expected of me. My parents were both in good positions: my mother in an accounts department, and my father who worked as a financial director. They both read the broadsheets and were well informed, although I would hesitate to call them intellectuals.

Discussions at our house were fairly limited, and usually started by my mother asking my father a question about some financial topic, and my dad answering it brusquely to show her she was of lower intellectual status, and it wasn’t really worth his time, or effort to discuss it! So on the whole, I didn’t gain much from these discussions.

I wasn’t really interested in school, although I think I enjoyed it. I tried hard at the things I enjoyed, and messed around in all the classes I didn’t.

My parents were both scottish, but we lived in england, and don’t ask me how, but during my time at private school, I developed a polite english accent.

I wasn’t really any good at anything, and I left school early, at seventeen, to try my luck in the workforce.

As I was travelling to work in london every day, I always bought a paper for the train journey – a broadsheet, like my parents read. I don’t know why I bought it, it just like a seemed normal thing to do.

I was always stuck in dead end jobs (think commission only telesales!), and never made any money, but I always read the financial sections of the paper! I was always interested in what was going on in the world, and I loved the paper because it opened up so many questions in my mind. The problem was finding someone to discuss all the new things I had learned, or observed during the day. My parents had split up, my

friends were all people who liked cars, girls, football and pubs, and all my work colleagues wanted to talk about was how much commission they were going to make that month.

Even as I moved up the financial ladder, and ended up in jobs in information technology, I was still mixing with people I couldn't discuss the topics which were of interest to me with. Who wanted to have a discussion with me about politics or economics? An economist or a politician? I don't think so. So I was left with pub topics and tabloid junk.

I really wanted to talk to someone – not because I wanted to show off what I knew – I just wanted to learn more. I wanted to talk to someone, but never got to meet the people who could discuss things I was interested in, as I was of low intellectual status. The people who would discuss things with me weren't interested in the topics I wanted to discuss. Catch 22.

The influence our family and friends have on our expected intellectual status is immense. If the topics you are exposed to are limited to what was on tv last night, the football results, the latest reality shows, the latest cars and gadgets, and the latest gossip from the local pub, I would expect you to fall into line with those topics. You see, we always follow the majority; no one wants to be unpopular by bringing up a topic he knows will be of no interest to his peers; so we conform.

Let me ask you a question. If you are talking to someone, how can you tell if they are of higher intellectual status than you? Is it because of the way they speak? Is it their accent? Perhaps bbc english or equivalent? Does their accent lead you to believe that they are more educated than you, and so make you feel inferior? Or is it because they have a higher position than you at work, that you assume this?

Does a manual worker feel inferior to the managing director if he comes around the factory to talk to "the workers?" Unfortunately, the answer is normally, yes. Why do you think this is?

- A. The director is wearing nicer clothes (because the manual worker has to wear protective clothing and the director does not get his hands dirty).
- B. The director speaks in an educated accent (because he is using the language correctly as it was meant to be used, not in a slang and loose way).
- C. The director pays your wages, and is the boss of everyone, so he must be more intelligent (because he was interested in business, applied himself to learning, and worked hard all his life to get to the position he is in now; not because he is more intellectual).
- D. The director can talk about more interesting things than you can (only because he is interested in them not because he is more intellectual).

The only difference between the factory worker and the director is not clothes, accent, or job title. It is that one was deeply interested in something (business) and applied himself to learning it. He is not more intelligent than the worker; he just has an interest that allows him to use his mind creatively.

Let me ask you another question. If the director found out that you both shared a deep interest for bird watching, do you think he would believe he was a superior bird watcher because he had a better job than you? Of course not. He would treat you as an intellectual equal, the same as you would treat him. You would happily go bird watching together, because that is the deep interest you share. The perceived gap between the workers and the directors is one only marked by interest.

If you worked on the factory floor and developed a deep interest for business and economics, you would study it and learn it – not because you had to – because you wanted to find out more about a subject you were interested in. Do you follow what I am trying to say here?

Are you not the most intelligent species on the planet, characterized by superior intelligence, and articulate speech? Is that you? Well, why don't you use it? I'm sorry to be blunt, but it is all too easy to conform to what you think is expected of you and just give up hope. You all have learned about the same things at school about life, and you may have found some subjects more difficult than others; even failed all subjects. I didn't do well either! The difference is, I was interested in life. I was interested in the world around me, the people, the politics, the why's and the why not's.

Interest, that's all you have to have, to begin to use your mind creatively. It doesn't matter if you work on a production line and only get to speak to your colleagues once a day. If you are deeply interested in

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

something, you are intellectual. You are using your mind. You are not just letting politicians and directors use their minds, you are a human being with the same brain capacity as every intellectual on the planet.

Don't let other people decide your intellectual status. Don't accept that you are destined to be a tabloid reader, or that you will be a production line worker; a human machine. You and I have huge brain capacity for learning; we just have to spark it off by being interested in something. Something not superficial. Something with enough depth to keep your interest; something like life!

Life! It's such a great interest to have. It's about people, it's about places, it's about family, politics, nature, water shortages, hunger, war, jobs, and health. It's about fun, laughter and crying. The more you are interested in life, the more you want to discuss it; you'll find plenty of people who want to discuss it with you – not just family members, but people from the wider community.

You decide on your intellectual status; your mind has more capacity than the biggest computers in the world; and the great thing about life is you don't need to go to university to study it, you're already part of it. Observe, watch, listen and participate.

There are conversations that need to be had all around the world about things too important to leave to the politicians, the media, the scientists or the intellectual elite. You are an intellectual. You hold solutions to world problems in your mind but you may not know it until you start the discussion.

Don't let your legacy to the world be that you worked, watched sport, drank beer and wine, and discussed tv shows, just because you believed that was where your intellectual status lay. You are so much more than that. You belong to the most intelligent species on the planet; don't let your creative mind go to waste. It's waiting to be used right now. This is a message I gave myself sometime ago.

[Back to Index](#)

Cool

1. *Fashionable and attractive at the time; often skilled or socially adept*

*He's so cool. Look at his cool clothes, cool girlfriend, and his cool car.
He talks about cool things, he does cool things, he's the coolest man I ever met.
He drinks in cool places, smokes cool cigarettes; he even does drugs, that's so cool.
I wanna be cool like him, dress like him, talk like him.
I wanna be cool too.*

It's a fact that some kids are cooler than others. From teenagers through to people in their thirties and beyond, some people just have that air of "coolness" about them. But what is it? Is it about dressing in the latest clothes, being an early adopter of new technology, knowing things other people want to know, or doing things other people envy, or want to imitate? Is it a certain aloofness that says "You can look but you can't touch?"

It could be many things, but one thing we know, is that other people want to be around cool people. They create the in-group or clique (*an exclusive circle of people with a common purpose*). Their purpose is that they all want to be cool. Let's look into this shall we?

We know that "coolness" is something that can't be readily defined – there is no scientific formula for it. One day you can be cool, and the next day you're not; but one thing's for sure, "cool" can't exist on it's own. If no one's watching, it doesn't matter what you're wearing, what designer drug you're taking, or what works of philosophy you happen to quote from; you need an audience to be cool.

We've all seen him, strutting down the corridor at school. Look at his shoes, look at his jacket; he's everything you're not. His calm, unruffled self-assurance; he's so confident, nothing can harm him. Everyone's looking at him; you want to be just like him. He pretends he doesn't know people are watching him, but you know he feels powerful inside, given all that attention.

In order to be cool, you don't have to be a high achiever at school; in many ways, it's an asset to actively rebel. To not do your homework, to smoke at break time, to disobey the teachers, to not wear your school uniform. People like a non-conformist, especially at school...

But children grow up. And as they grow up, fashions change, and the cool guy isn't so cool anymore, especially when he leaves school early. You see him standing at the gates, smoking after school, still trying to be cool, trying to impress the younger kids, but now you start to pity him.

Then there's the guy in his twenties who dresses in fashionable clothes, does drugs, goes out partying to the coolest bars, but has the great job in advertising; he drives a flashy sports car, is above average intelligence, and likes the finer things in life. He went to a good school, is well educated, and can talk about art and poetry.

Yeah, he's cool; everyone wants to be like him. He's got the latest music in his car, he knows the coolest places to go on holiday, but he's so wrapped up in his own importance, people soon start to lose interest. Life is all about him, the things he has, knows and does; he doesn't really care about you, but he's happy to have you a long for the ride as long as you keep admiring him.

Then there's the physicist. He doesn't follow fashions, he doesn't drive a flashy car, he always did well at school, never rebelled. He enjoys talking about quantum theory and particle accelerators. Want to be like him? Want to be cool? No, unfortunately, physics is not on the cool list. Unless you're another physicist, that is.

Far from being super-confident, the cool guy is, in fact, rather superficial. He needs to impress you with his clothes, his knowledge, and his possessions. There is a certain shallowness about him – a lack of substance. A feeling that all he is, is on show. He has developed social skills that allow him to be liked, whether it's charm or aloofness.

He will change according to the tastes of the audience. If the audience don't think he's cool anymore, he'll go somewhere else where he is.

Coolness is all about impressing people, whether you like it or not. A person with real self-esteem, real self-confidence in themselves, does not need to impress other people with shallow bolt-ons such as clothes, music, or stories of places he's been.

Unfortunately, most of us don't know we're doing it. We don't realise that we are developing a false image to show to people. You may say "But I just like wearing the latest clothes, going to the latest bars, listening to the latest music, going to the newest holiday destination; I'm not trying to impress people." But trying to be cool is not about one thing in isolation; it's about creating a package that people will like. You are constructing an external image that does not reflect the internal one; the longer you keep up the facade, the more you lose touch with the real you.

I can't really remember too well, but I think I was well liked at school; a bit of a joker, and someone who

couldn't concentrate well. I kept everyone amused with my antics, but didn't earn the respect of my teachers. I remember hanging out with the cool kids, the ones with the latest fashions and latest music. I really wanted to be like them, so I bought the same music, and got my mum to buy me the same clothes.

When I left school, I found myself on the outside of a rebellious group in the town who were always drinking, doing drugs, and being generally anti-social. I knew I wasn't like that, but everyone used to think they were cool, so I tried to get in with them. I hung around the same pubs, dressed like them and hoped to be accepted. One day I was accepted, and I found myself in the in-group, getting drunk, not going to work, taking drugs, and being anti-social towards my parents. Fortunately, this only lasted a year or so, and I left the group.

All my life I wanted to be in music. I wanted to be cool like the rock stars, but I didn't play any instruments (I played flute, but that's not really cool). I bought synthesisers I couldn't play, drum machines I couldn't program, recording equipment I didn't know how to use, and recorded songs that weren't any good; just to tell people I was "doing music." I was never really committed to being in a band; in fact I never joined one. I just wanted to be famous so people would think I was cool; but I did love karaoke! I was a fairly good singer, and it was nice to have an audience.

Many years have passed since that time, but I still like to wear nice clothes and listen to new music – I'm not ashamed to admit it. I like when people look at my clothes, or comment on how good my music choices are, but I am older now; with age, comes a certain realisation that caring about what people think of how I look, the music I listen to, the job I do, or where I've been on holiday, really doesn't represent my internal image. I have learned to admit to myself that the external image I had been projecting, didn't reflect the tensions and anxieties I was feeling inside.

In the past, the insecurities I was feeling in a relationship, or the problems I was experiencing with panic attacks, were masked by the cool exterior image. That is, until I was no longer able to keep the external image together due to the pressure, and it crumbled; exposing my inner weaknesses and true personality.

At this point people stopped thinking I was so "cool." They couldn't understand what had happened to me. How could such a cool guy now be this weak, pathetic, emotional wreck? I stopped caring about trying to impress other people and decided to start living my life more genuinely, and since that time, my inner-confidence has grown stronger. I feel whole now. I don't feel as if I am shielding my inner-self, for the fifteen minutes of fame that being "cool" gives you.

In the constant battle to keep up with what is cool, we lose sight of ourselves; who we really are, and not who we would like to be. We drink alcohol to be cool; we take party drugs to be cool.

Imagine if it was cool to not be addicted to things. Imagine how cool that would be!

How cool is it not to drink!
How cool is it not to smoke!
How cool is it not to take drugs!
How cool is it not to drive a car!
How cool is it not to worry about what people think anymore!
How cool is it to be nice to people!
How cool is it to think about someone other than yourself!
How cool is it to go for a walk in the country!
How cool is it to just relax...

So, being cool may have a positive part to play after all; especially for young people who can be so easily influenced by others. We have to start doing what we want to do, without worrying what other people will think. So play an old song you really like that was never fashionable, in front of your peers, or wear an old hat to a party; anything you like to do for *you*, not to impress someone else. You never know, they may think you're cool, but on the other hand, who cares? If people only like you for the clothes you wear, the music you listen to, or the volume of alcohol you can consume, they are not true friends.

You may think you're cool, but you're only cool if someone else thinks you are.

[Back to Index](#)

Core

1. *The centre of an object*
2. *The central part of the Earth*
3. *The choicest or most essential or most vital part of some idea or experience*

I have mentioned this word in one or two topics. Some of you with a more religious background might interpret this as being the soul (*the immaterial part of a person; the actuating cause of an individual life*), but that is a man-made idea and has no relevance to what I would like to discuss with you. I would like you to try to follow what I am saying here, and imagine for yourself in your own mind if it is possible. So if you are all ready, I would now like to do a virtual striptease for you all.

Stripping in front of the mirror!

I stand in front of a mirror and I see my reflection. I have just showered and shaved. I am of average height. I wear a pair of jeans, fashionable boxer shorts, fashionable trainers, a hooded sweatshirt, t-shirt, wooden beads round my neck, and a hat. When I go out, that is how people will see me; and in their minds they will perceive what sort of person I am.

First, I remove my hat. I notice I have no hair on top of my head, just skin with a few stray hairs I have missed whilst shaving. I lost my hair in my twenties, and spent several years trying to cover it up because I was embarrassed by what people would say; that people would make fun of me, and I wouldn't be attractive to women any more.

I move down, and see I have small hairs in my ears, something that reminds me of getting older. I have green/grey eyes which were once my best feature, or so I thought. Now my eyes have developed wrinkles around them, and are looking tired. My nose is now slightly bent, possibly through heading a football, but I had never really noticed this before.

Age is catching up with me, and hairs are now protruding slightly from my nose, much to my girlfriend's distaste. I have a cut on the corner of my upper lip where my friend's dog bit me, eighteen years ago. My lips are thin on top and my mouth quite small. I open my mouth and examine my teeth. My front tooth is greyish white where a teenager head-butted me, because he was drunk, nineteen years ago; I have had it bleached several times, but it is still a bit grey, causing me to be self-conscious when I smile in photographs.

I have a smallish jaw, and recently noticed I am starting to develop a double chin where fat is gathering.

I take off my hooded top, t-shirt, and beads, and I examine myself. I have never been fat, but I notice I have developed fat around my chest area, which I find distasteful. I go to the gym and diet occasionally to get rid of it, but it is still there. My chest is quite hairy, and I still have a little bit of fat around my stomach, which I have persistently tried to get rid of, but have failed.

My shoulders are quite bony, with little tufts of hair on them, which seem to be increasing with each year I live. I notice that the work I am doing in the gym has increased my biceps slightly, and this pleases me, although my forearms and wrists are still quite skinny.

I have quite nice hands, I think, and my nails are always well manicured (people often say that this is because I was brought up by my mother, who did manicures for elderly people).

I turn and look over my shoulder at my back. My back is still strong, but little clumps of hair have formed under my shoulder blades. This disgusted me when I first noticed it, so I tried to wax them several years ago. This was an incredibly painful process, and I have never repeated it! Moving down, my waist is still slim, although I have gone up a size in the last five years.

I now remove my jeans and my boxer shorts, and start to feel more self-conscious. I wonder if anyone is looking at me through the window, so I hurriedly close the curtains and shut the door. I examine my penis and testicles, which all too often rule men's and women's lives, but on close examination are no more than wrinkly bits of skin; neither "sexy," nor exciting – actually, they're rather dull.

A patch of hair protrudes above my penis, and wiry looking hairs protrude from my testicles. This is the part that people "groom" by shaving, or styling to make attractive to the opposite sex, but that all seems quite ridiculous now.

I turn around and examine my bottom. I have always thought I had a nice rounded bottom (or so some women have said). I am still pleased with it!

I move down to my thighs and calves which are hairy, and actually quite skinny, although feel strong to the touch. I move down to my skinny ankles and my feet, which poke out the bottom; they look in proportion. My toe nails are well trimmed and clean.

So this is me. This is how I was born. A lot smaller and slightly less hairy, but nevertheless, the same. I have got older, and fatter, and more wrinkled, but I am the same child who was ejected from my mother's womb on the 6th april 1969, sometime after midnight.

As I stand here, I am like my ancestors who (allegedly) came down from the trees in africa, started walking upright, and developed the power of thought and language. I am not "cool," I am nothing, yet I am something – I am tangible; I am "real."

But naked I am vulnerable. I will get cold if I go outside. People will laugh at me, shout obscenities at me, pity me as mad; the police will probably arrest me for indecent exposure, and I will be locked up, and fined. No one will envy me, no one will respect me, no one will talk to me, or listen to me. All I am is a middle aged, hairy, lump of skin and bone. I am pathetic. I cannot work as no one would employ me, and I am an embarrassment to my friends and family. Ultimately society rejects me. I do not fit in.

That's incredible, isn't it? I am the same person as when I had all my clothes on yet now I am naked people perceive me as different. But that difference is all in the mind. It cannot exist anywhere else. A million years of evolution, and now we are embarrassed by *who we are*. You see, "who we are" has nothing to do with who we think we are, or what we want to be or become, it is the reflection of the naked self in the mirror. That is me.

I am not successful, that is purely external. I am not attractive, that is perception, and comparison. I am not rich; I have no pockets to carry my money in. I just have a body controlled by an advanced management computer, and an efficient pump. Do I feel free, powerful, or in tune with the natural world? No, I do not. In fact, I can't wait to get dressed so I can become myself again!

Adding it all back

"Ahh that's better!" I think, as I first cover my very "personal" genital area. At least if anyone came in and saw me, I wouldn't be as embarrassed. I then put my trendy jeans on and cover my hairy skinny legs. Next come the socks, which cover my nicely trimmed nails (I'm not so worried about my feet). Next I pull on my t-shirt, and a baggy hooded sweatshirt, covering my slightly flabby chest, stomach, and clumps of hair on my back; which makes me start to look more human. On go the wooden beads round my neck, which have a slightly "ethnic" feel to them, and are in fashion; followed by the shoes, and finally the hat, to cover the bald head. That's better!

I look at myself in the full length mirror, and start to admire myself. I look coordinated and cool. I grab my car keys and coat, and head out. As I park the car, and go to get out, I notice I am feeling pretty confident about myself. I don't care if people look at me; in fact I positively welcome it. I know they could not be saying anything bad about the way I look. They may even admire me.

As I talk to people in shops, I know they will not think badly of me, because I have a good command of the english language, and have a polite accent. When I arrive at work, I know I am good at my job, and have good communication skills, and will fit in perfectly. I look forward to meeting my friends in the pub later, because I have a good sense of humour and they like me, and I look forward to spending time with my girlfriend, because she thinks I'm really nice, but then, this is all an illusion I have created.

Are you starting to get the idea? If I go to church, wear religious clothing, drive a specific type of car, live in a certain size house, or have a specific kind of job, people will think something about me. Naked, and without these bolt-on "accessories," I am nothing in the world. I am pure animal. I am dangerous to people because I do not fit in with their idea of what a human is. Do you see?

Our species, homo sapiens, is born naked, but we are quick to cover him up; to fill his head with ideas of right and wrong, but that is not who *he* is. That is what the conditioners, such as parents and teachers want him to be.

*Underneath our clothes we are all the same, human
The only thing that separates us is our minds.*

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Finding the core I speak of does not mean finding all the answers to the universe; it's more like a starting point, where one can start to explore questions such as consciousness and interconnectivity. Without removing human bolt-ons, how can we ever hope to see the world as it truly "is?" Only by laying ourselves bare in front of the mirror – without comparison or judgement – can the process begin.

I urge all of you to remove your clothes layer by layer, and start to uncover something more wondrous than anything humans could ever invent. Try it. Play with watching your thoughts as you imagine yourself naked in the street! Imagine what people would think of you without all your clever ideas and your possessions. What have you got to lose? Only embarrassment, but that's a good thing to lose.

[Back to Index](#)

Corporations

1. *A business firm whose articles of incorporation have been approved in some state*

This topic has been given me a lot of trouble over the last few months. How would I start it? How could I make it balanced and not appear biased? How could I convey my view without criticising every company on the planet? I decided to leave it. But as there are few topics left, I finally have to tackle it. So let's go on a journey around the corporate world.

I've got an idea!

Let's be fair. Corporations (or companies, depending on where you live), start as an idea. Not an idea of how to make as much money as possible and exploit all the world's resources. On the contrary, they usually start as an idea of how to make something better, or how to make life easier and more pleasurable. And from that idea, usually grows something; probably small at first, but if it's a good idea, then everyone will want the product or service. So let's not demonise people as some "anti-capitalists" do, and instead, commend them on their innovation. That is what Man is seriously good at, after all.

I want to talk to you about one idea which is now a well known product in our life. It is the mobile telephone. I don't have all the details of who invented it, but it first started out life in cars, and even in the eighties, was still a chunky bit of equipment in the boot, a hand held receiver in the car, and a big aerial outside. The reception was patchy to say the least.

As the first companies in the market started to build more towers, coverage improved, but unless the person you were calling was in a populated area you would probably hear "the mobile you are calling is not available." I know it used to frustrate me terribly when I would try to call my dad.

"The mobile number you are calling, is switched off" was another message I would often hear because the phone only worked if the someone was in the car, and it was running!

After a couple of years, the transportable was introduced. It was portable (if you call lugging a huge piece of equipment attached to a phone portable), but only people who really needed it had one, such as people in engineering or building jobs where they were off site etc. But the phone companies worked hard, and so did the electronic chip and battery manufacturers to get the size down. And so, the first truly portable phone was launched, and it looked like a brick!

Several years went past with the phones gradually getting smaller, the coverage improving, and the battery life getting longer. In about 1995, the first digital phones were launched in the uk, and that's where the pace started hotting up. The screens were still small and the functionality was, what you would call, "basic," but they now had the added option of text messages and voicemail. Wow! Is all I can say. You could send a short "sms" to someone, without having to talk to them, and if they were out of range you could leave them a message which would be replayed to them when their phone was back on. It was a fantastic revolution.

The problem was, they were expensive to run. But as more and more people bought into this revolution the price came down, the phones got better, they had colour screens, calculators and notepads, and the coverage was improving by the day.

Roaming was then switched on, and that meant you could travel abroad with your phone and be contactable on the same number. The dialling party didn't have to know where you were, they just called your number and the magical cellular networks would bounce the call direct to you, whether you were at a business lunch in los angeles, or a product launch in tokyo. But it was still primarily a business tool.

I loved my mobile. It was a great way to keep in touch with people when I was overseas, or away from home; and the best thing was, the company picked up the tab.

Let's fast forward to 2008; where three months ago, I got rid of my mobile phone for good. What used to be a good idea had now turned into a menace. This is how it happened.

Over the last ten years, everyone bought a mobile. Some people even got rid of their landlines, and instead of calling, people would "text" (not a verb surely) each other.

Beep Beep "Hi whatcha up to?"

Beep Beep "Not much watchin TV"

Beep Beep “What ya watchin?”

Beep Beep “Nothin”

Beep Beep “wanna go out for a bit”

Beep Beep “where?”

Beep Beep “pub?”

Beep Beep “which one?”

Beep Beep “usual”

Beep Beep “C U L8TR” (a new language was being developed)

Beep Beep “where are you?”

Beep Beep “nearly there”

Beep Beep “C U in a minute”

And then they would meet up in the pub for a pint and a chat... but not for long

Beep Beep “where are you?”

Beep Beep “in the pub”

Beep Beep “who with?”

Beep Beep “just a mate”

Beep Beep “cool”

And then one of the people would “have” to call his girlfriend to say he was in the pub.

“Hi, honey, just in the pub, won’t be too late... Did you? ... Really! ...”

Meanwhile his other friend had to find something to do while his friend was talking on the phone: “HIYA what’ ya doin?” he “texted” another friend.

Beep Beep “not much, you?”

Beep Beep “In the pub with a mate.”

Beep Beep “COOL!”

They would then settle back to their pints, but guaranteed, the phones would soon be beeping with text messages and calls would be being made.

The epidemic was spreading quickly. After a 24 hour flight to australia I would notice that almost as soon as the plane landed, there would be various beeping tones going off, with people desperate to check their mobiles, just in case they had a message – just in case it was “important.”

We have to remember that just twenty years ago, these phones didn’t exist, and we have been doing without them for thousands of years! But now parents give their kids mobiles “just in case” they need to call, or something happens to them; and on every street, most young people are walking with their eyes down, looking at a screen, or have some stupid headset sticking out of their ears.

Mobiles have almost become attached to people’s bodies, and they get anxious if their phone is out of sight for more than a couple of minutes. Kids use them in class, people use them on trains, buses and trams, “YES I CAN HEAR YOU! I’M ALMOST THERE!” People even have them beside them at the dinner table.

We are psychologically attached to them now (see attachment topic), and the whole world is ringing in different tunes and beeping constantly.

I just couldn’t understand what had happened. What was so important that it couldn’t wait until the end of the film? Maybe it is exciting knowing you may have received a text message?

So now we have the noise of the mobile phones, and people talking loudly. Great! Just what we need in an already overly noisy world.

I don’t know anyone who doesn’t have a mobile, and thanks to the incessant advertising by the phone companies about how cool you will look with their new phone (which after all is just a phone), they have become a fashion accessory. It’s all you ever hear people talking about: “Oh yes, did I tell you I just got a new phone, and I’ve got a new number. I’ll give it to you just in case.”

“This is absolute madness” I thought. In less than twenty years, we have become addicted to something we don’t even need.

I’m sure some people will be saying: “Yes, but in an emergency...”

All I can say is “Did we not have emergencies over the last million years?”

“Yes, but it is a dangerous world we live in now...”

But how does the mobile phone make it more safe? All it does is creates fear when you don’t have it.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

So three months ago, I broke up my mobile phone, and put it in the recycle bin; and do you know what? I haven't missed it at all. And if people ask me "What's your mobile number?" I will take great pleasure in telling them I don't have one!

So as you can see, and probably hear, wherever you are in the world (people were even using their mobiles when they came for retreats at the island I was volunteering at), mobiles have gone from being a great idea, to an addictive nuisance the world over. But who's fault is it? Mr vodafone's or mr nokia's? Of course not. They had an idea, implemented it, and it worked. These corporations grew to global size, not because they were intent on world domination, but because of us! Do you understand? So we are all responsible for mobile phones being everywhere; for the annoying ringtones, and kids not paying attention to anything anyone says because they're chatting on the phone! It's not our fault they are addictive (or is it us, who are easily addicted?).

*Who's for a burger and coke?
I said who's for a...
Oh, sorry you're listening to your mp3 player*

I am not going to bore you with any more examples of ideas turned into billion dollar corporations, but I'm sure you can all have a guess at some of the products. Before we complain about these companies making billions of dollars a year, let's not forget how they got so rich! Because we made them rich. The operating system I am running this laptop on is a prime example of a good idea by a couple of guys turned into a multi-billion dollar corporation. Made possible by... You guessed it! Us.

But what happens to these people who start with these good ideas and suddenly get rich and powerful? Well one thing is for sure, they'll do anything to hang on to it, whatever the cost. It's a shame, but when people get power, they change.

Now they have responsibility for many employees, and they also have a responsibility to the shareholders (if, like most corporations, they are publicly quoted) to keep bringing in the money. I don't want to talk about power or profit here, because if a company makes a profit (*the excess of revenues over outlays in a given period of time, including depreciation and other non-cash expenses*) it just means they are good at their business. So let's not hassle them over something which is an essential part of trading. You must have something to put back into research and development if you are to stay one step ahead of the competition, otherwise your business, the share price, and the employees jobs go down the tube!

Shareholders

1. Someone who holds shares of stock in a corporation

When I was younger, my dad ran a publicly quoted company, and he always made a point of telling us when the share price went up – I guess it made him feel proud that his hard work was being rewarded. He bought my mum and I shares in the company and my mum bought me shares in a telecom company, a bank, and the newly privatised gas company – not many, but I guess she saw it as an investment for later life for me.

I don't own them now, not because I think it is ethically wrong to hold shares, but because I sold them when I was nineteen or so (probably to pay for my hectic social life). People all over the world own shares, don't they? Some own only a couple of hundred, but some groups, such as pension funds own billions of dollars worth.

Shares are a good investment if you know what you're doing. The small print says they could always go down as well as up, but if you play your cards right you are going to keep getting dividends (*that part of the earnings of a corporation that is distributed to its shareholders; usually paid quarterly*). So corporations have to keep the shareholders happy, and a company that makes a lot of money means happy shareholders!

This means the business cannot afford to stagnate. They cannot afford to rest easy when the share price is high; they have to constantly innovate and market new products to stay ahead of the game; and without realising it, the shareholders become responsible for the company's actions.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Did this mean that companies were being forced to expand, create new markets, cut corners on environmental and social issues, just to keep the shareholders happy? I had to find out; so I called a large pension fund to see what was going on.

- Me:** Hi, my name's alan. I wonder if I might have a few minutes of your time to discuss shareholders and their responsibilities.
- Fund Manager:** Well, as long as you're not a journalist, I can give you a couple of minutes.
- Me:** Thanks. Now, your pension fund manages millions of dollars right? And you invest some of that money in stocks and shares.
- Fund Manager:** Correct.
- Me:** Why do you invest money in shares isn't it a bit risky?
- Fund Manager:** Not if it is done correctly. We are very careful about the sorts of companies we invest in.
- Me:** So what makes a good company?
- Fund Manager:** Plenty of capital, strong leadership, innovative products or services and a good long term strategy.
- Me:** So does it matter what market sector they are operating in?
- Fund Manager:** Not really. We generally tend to stay away from start up businesses and companies that are registered in any, shall we say, "unstable" political and economic environments.
- Me:** Are you concerned with environmental issues, or social issues?
- Fund Manager:** We have an ethics policy, if that's what you mean, but we rely on the corporations to make sure they have their own ethics policy.
- Me:** Does that mean you will invest in companies that make weapons, or are involved in addicting the nation to things like cigarettes?
- Fund Manager:** I don't think I like where this is going, but I will say this, we invest in blue chip (*a common stock of a nationally known company whose value and dividends are reliable; (typically have high price and low yield) whose businesses are well known who have good brand loyalty*) companies.
- Me:** So it doesn't matter if what they make or do is damaging to the environment, or the people, only that the stock is reliable? Surely that is a bit unethical wouldn't you say?
- Fund Manager:** It is not our job to judge businesses on their chosen markets we are only concerned with how the business is performing, but we wouldn't invest in a business where there was likely to be social problems or protests, because then we could lose money and we have to protect our own investors pensions.
- Me:** But some of these businesses are causing havoc with the environment, and are causing social problems by addicting people to their products, and changing the way we interact socially, things like mobile phones, computer gadgets, and a host of other products, not to mention the companies that make defence products.
- Fund Manager:** Like I said, it is not our business to judge them, if there are any ethical or social problems, that is a matter for the government, or other agencies, not for us. We are merely trying to get the best for our investors.
- Me:** At any cost?
- Fund Manager:** I'm sorry, I have to go now; this conversation is ended. Goodbye.
- Me:** Oh, thanks... Bye.

So before we start blaming companies, whose only job it is to make products, sell them, and make a profit so they can stay in business, let's start looking to that elusive group of individuals behind the brand; the shareholders. People like you and me, wittingly and unwittingly investing money into organisations whose only goal is to please us!

What do you think they would do to keep us happy? Anything? Would they do what ever it took to make sure that the shareholders had a good dividend every quarter? Would they carry on uprooting the environment, selling addictive products (not just nicotine, but all consumer goods), moving businesses to countries where the labour and production cost is lower, getting involved in markets that bring pain and

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

suffering to people, like the defence industry? You betcha! And they're doing it all for you. Because without people like you, these massive public corporations wouldn't exist.

Sure, the customers are to blame too, but you underpin the whole operation, just so you can get your greedy little fingers on your dividend cheque; hoping one day to sell the shares for a massive profit. And do you care what these companies do? Not one bit. As long as you're happy, the rest of the world can go jump!

There are of course, companies, whose work is only for the benefit of all beings on this planet, but I'm yet to find one. If you do, can you let me know, and I'll be sure to amend this topic. But until then, remember that if you own shares in a company you are sanctioning anything and everything it does; all in the name of profit – yours. So please be careful where you put your money; it could be affecting us all more than you know.

[Back to Index](#)

Cosmetics

1. *A toiletry designed to beautify the body*

Anti-Ageing, Extra Sexy
Look Healthy Magic Cream
It's Beauty in a Box

All women seem to wear make up these days. A woman's make up bag is an essential part of who she is, it seems, but where did it all start? As far as I am aware, they had quite advanced forms of beautification in the time of Cleopatra, in Egypt, a couple of thousand years ago, and its origins may be from much further back in time. But we are here to discuss it in its modern context.

What I want to know is why we cake creams and mascara onto our faces! Faces that are so pure and beautiful on their own, before they are covered with a creamy facade. Our skin is delicate and needs the right moisture and exposure to the air to remain healthy, but hydration comes from within not from outside.

Wearing make-up doesn't hide either, it projects and it accentuates. It projects an image of who the women want to be seen to be. In short (if you didn't know it already) it is worn to attract men. You may not agree with me here, but think about what you wear. Eye mascara to accentuate the eyes, lipstick to accentuate the full lips. Blusher or powder to accentuate the cheekbones. This is all about animal attraction. The need to attract a mate. So is this about biology then?

We know it is hard wired into a woman's brain to find a suitable mate with whom to have children with, and she uses whatever tools she has at her disposal. Much like a bird who displays all his colours during the mating season, women apply false colours to try to achieve the same effect.

So isn't it perfectly normal to make yourself as beautiful as you can be to attract a mate you want? Isn't the idea of accentuating the most sexual parts of your face mimicking nature? I hear most women reading this saying "I don't know why he's going on about make-up; I like wearing make-up, it makes me feel good. Why shouldn't I wear something that makes me feel more attractive. I'm not doing it to attract a man, I'm doing it for me!"

Whilst having a conversation with a friend a couple of years ago, I remarked that her make-up was always immaculate, and I asked her (jokingly) if she ever took it off. To my surprise, she said that not only did she go to bed with her boyfriend in the evening with make-up on, but she also got up in the morning to apply fresh make-up before her boyfriend got up. In short, her boyfriend had never seen her as she was meant to be – natural. Now I for one, found it sad that someone had to hide under cosmetics; what I would call false beauty, even though it was quite obvious to anyone, that she was pretty anyway. But she never showed her true self.

Whilst this may be an uncommon story, I did start to investigate it more; the more women friends I talked to, the more I found that wearing make-up all the time was common; even when they did have a man, and no longer needed to attract him with long dark eyelashes and pouty red lips! They wore it all the time because that was who they were. They weren't hiding anything, nor trying to project anything; without make-up, their whole being, personality, and their self-worth was incomplete.

When they looked at themselves in the mirror, the true self was the one wearing the make-up – the one with the sultry eyes, sexy lips, and raised cheekbones painted on. Gone was the reality of nature, the face that has been evolving for millions of years, and brought in was the false, man-made beauty.

The thing is, men have become addicted to make-up as well, and also don't want to go out with a girl with a "plain" face. They want her to look "stunning," they want her to look "beautiful." They want her to smoulder; even if it is under a load of old grease paint! Of course men are attracted to women with make-up. The dark eyes are meant to draw you in; the plump red lips meant to imitate the physical state when a woman is excited and her lips fill with blood, mimicking the sexual organ, also inviting you in... Who would a man be attracted to? The woman looking painted and seductive, or the "plain" girl? We have become so conditioned into believing that this is how women "should" look naturally, that we seem to have forgotten that it is all man-made.

I don't know about you but I am quite impressed with the way nature has dealt with things over the last few billion years, and I am also a believer that nature has pretty much thought of everything whilst we have been evolving over the last million years or so. In fact, we are so perfect, anatomically, that I would hazard a guess to say that if nature had intended us to have thick black eyelashes, accentuated cheeks, and bright shiny lipstick, they would have come as standard!

I am not suggesting that women shouldn't wear exactly what they want, I just want to explore it with you. It seems to me that women don't think about why they are wearing it; it's just something you do as you get older. Unfortunately, young children are now encouraged to play at dressing up where they wear make-up, which starts the conditioning process off. They see their sister and their mother wearing it, so they just accept

that it's something you should do. It is teaching every young girl that the only way to be beautiful is to apply cosmetics on your skin. It teaches that beauty is something that can be bought in a jar.

Beauty

1. The qualities that give pleasure to the senses

The old saying "beauty is in the eye of the beholder" just doesn't seem to ring true. We feast with our eyes before we even strike up a conversation, and we are naturally drawn to features we judge as attractive.

We take in all the primary information we need to know about a person's beauty from their face. Some people have striking facial features which seem to be in perfect symmetry, and for some reason, please all of us (think fashion models). Unfortunately, this accidental mix of genes which resulted in these features is taken as the benchmark for what beauty should be, and the rest of us spend our time trying to live up to this seemingly impossible standard.

Of course, the cosmetic companies love our insecurities, and they come up with all sorts of products to cover up "those little blemishes." The stupid thing about it is that most of the models in the magazines have been "touched up" by computer to make them look perfect.

As all of you should know, there is no such thing as perfection, only subjective judgement; and if I judge myself to be beautiful, then so be it! I am beautiful.

The problem with the word beauty, is that it naturally goes along with another word, and that is compare (*examine and note the similarities or differences of*).

We are constantly comparing ourselves with others. We are always looking at others to see if they are more beautiful than we are. Then we look in the mirror to compare ourselves to them. We feel forced to constantly evaluate our faces and bodies. For women, and slightly less so for men, the need to compare represents a physical need to assert whether we are attractive enough for someone else to pick as a mate.

Of course, some people prefer specific features (height, hair colour, body type etc.) over others, but this need to constantly evaluate and compare – what are, in essence, just the surface of who we are – is sad in my opinion. Every human being on this planet is beautiful, and I don't mean that flippantly, I mean it in all seriousness. Under every skin is a golden light. A mass of swirling energy, bursting with vibrancy, swathed in colour, full of real beauty. Not superficial, like the position and shape of the nose, the height of the forehead, the shape of the chin, the definition of the cheekbones, the plumpness of the lips.

Let me ask you a question: How many of you have met a woman (or a man) whom you thought unattractive on first meeting? I have. How many of you have noticed that the more you get to know them, the more the shape of the nose, the crookedness of the teeth, the width of the chin, becomes less and less important; and the more you understand about them, the more you like them? It's strange, because you would always believe you would end up going for the most attractive man or woman; but in the end, it is not the looks that are important, but what makes up the whole person. But *still* we compare. We worry that our choice may be too ugly, and friends may make fun of us – but then they are not our friends.

Why do we always seek perfection?

Perhaps seeking perfection is a natural process, and we are looking for a mate with "the right stuff." If that is true, then we will always be drawn to features that some would call beauty. But what I want to know is why we are so critical of ourselves.

"I'm too fat," "I'm too spotty," "I'm too this, too that."

We are critical, I believe, not because we don't love ourselves, but because we are concerned about what others will think of us. "Am I beautiful?" girls may ask. "Am I handsome?" men may question, but if you were not comparing yourself with others, what use would the question be? Think about it for a moment. "Am I more beautiful than her?" How could you tell unless you use the all powerful media yardstick? The measure that all must compare to – the models. The most perfect. The finest features. The biggest bust. The most slender waist, the most rounded (but firm) buttocks. The longest toned legs (and that's just the

women!).

Let me ask you another few questions. What do you want to look like? Are you not happy in your own skin? Do you want plastic surgery? Do you want a facelift?" The sorry answer to these questions is that in a lot of cases you do! You must look perfect, like the models. You listen to what the media says.

You read those stupid magazines that tell you how to firm your bust, tone up your legs, and "attract a man!" (The same magazines are on sale for men too.) But there is one thing you are forgetting, and that is that the cosmetic (including diet/fashion) industry, is worth billions of dollars. Of course they want you to think you aren't perfect. They know you want to be perfect. They know you don't have perfect breasts/legs/nose etc. And do you want to know why?

Because they invented the definition of perfection

There is no perfect. If you can exercise and make yourself fitter, eat a healthy diet, drink lots of water then the golden radiance we talked about earlier will come through, you won't need a face pack of cosmetics to make you "appear" healthy and attractive. If you are healthy on the inside, psychologically and physically, and think positively about everything you are and everything you do, you will have a natural beauty far exceeding anything these expensive nothing creams can do for you.

By all means keep putting on make-up, but think about one thing: Why? Your skin is perfect (even if you suffer from acne). Plastering on make-up will only make it worse in later years.

The adverts will pander to your secret fears of becoming old and unattractive, but don't listen to them. You must shine from the inside out, and the only way to do that is not by applying "maxi-hydration mask with 15 super ingredients to make you look 30 years younger in 14 days." You are human! You *will* get wrinkles, it's a simple fact. Your body *will* change as you start to get older, the skin tone *will* loosen, but it is reflecting the fact you *have* lived!

Please explore this topic with me carefully. We are teaching our children that beauty comes in the form of a lipstick or eyebrow pencil. You have the responsibility to tell your children "You are beautiful," and to "accept you are beautiful without the need for an artificial mask." What shame is there in showing your eyes as they are, your lips as they are. Feel the power of beauty inside. No matter how many layers of the mask you put on, remember you *will* have to take it off one day. What have you got to lose?

Break free from the control of the cosmetics companies. Break free from comparison. Do not judge yourself or others. Accept. Let go. You are amazing. You are love. You are radiance. You *do not* have to wear make-up to find love.

[Back to Index](#)

Creativity

1. The ability to create

When we talk of people being “creative,” we automatically think of painters, poets, writers, musicians, actors, or singers, but we never really think of ourselves as being creative without those labels. We all like art (*the creation of beautiful or significant things, the products of human creativity*); we go to the movies, attend concerts, read books, and we wander round art exhibitions trying to look intelligent; pretending we understand what the artist “really was trying to say” when he painted a bunch of flowers or left a pile of bricks labelled “society” on the floor. Artists do try to represent what the nation is feeling at the time, and they are sometimes making a comment on society and its ills using metaphors. But creativity is so much more than that.

What we like to call “art,” is more like entertainment to me (sorry to all you “serious” artists out there trying to make a difference to society), where people put on a show for the masses to keep them amused, or diverted from reality. After all, the governments have always sent in entertainers to keep the troops happy and make them forget why they’re really there (killing people).

Governments like art. It stops the people from questioning what they and their friends in big business are up to. It’s like using the magician’s slight of hand, where he directs you to look somewhere else to divert your attention from what he is really doing.

Last week, I sat watching a Swedish comedian/social commentator/magician at work, and although I didn’t understand a word of what he was saying, I still laughed along with the crowd. But as I was laughing, I started to look around me at the crowd enjoying themselves, and began to wonder who these people really were, what they did for a living, what they thought about life, what their hopes, dreams, and fears were; and I realised that most of them were probably asleep.

They probably worked hard, paid their bills on time, and were nice to their husbands and wives. They probably bought presents for loved ones, and either had a family, or hoped to have one in the future. As I sat there, I suddenly felt sad that whilst these people were being entertained, their minds were being kept solidly off questioning why they were really here on this planet. All of their lives were taken up making sure they crossed the “t’s” and dotted the “i’s.” Their lives were being guided by an unknown force, and no, it wasn’t god at work, it was the people in power who needed them to conform and keep quiet so they could get on with the business of controlling the people and directing the future of the show (planet earth).

They relied upon people like the magician I was watching, to allow the people to question what was going on, but within a controlled environment; safe in the knowledge that as soon as the show was over, the people would get back to their daily lives, back to work, and get back to paying their taxes; because, “contributing to society,” is what we are here for right?

I thought perhaps I was being a bit cynical, but the more I looked around the auditorium, the more I felt I was staring into hollow eyes, conditioned by society to conform, or else.

Fortunately for the government, art of any kind (no matter how deep the meaning, or however revolutionary the content), is still classed as art, and once it is contained in that box it is forever labelled.

The only difference seems to be books. Books have the ability to reach a vast audience and allow them time to digest the content. Within the book, the reader has the ability to stop and consider life outside of the conditioning – I have been inspired by many authors work – but if the content is too inflammatory, the government or the church will probably have it pulled or some smear campaign will be started about the integrity of the author. But normally, the government will just let it go. They know that books still come under the label “art,” so they know they are safe.

A creativity revolution

So although I advise all of you to take an acting class, or to learn to play an instrument in order to express yourself, there is one thing you can do to create a revolution, and that is to be yourself. Does that make any sense?

For so many years now, people have been kept asleep. We have been kept (superficially at least) happy by the promise of plentiful employment, healthcare, the purchase of cheap consumer goods, cheap package holidays, and a state retirement plan if you’re lucky. You may accuse me of being a conspiracy theorist (*a*

secret agreement between two or more people to perform an unlawful act), but there is nothing illegal about what is going on in the world. Every country has some law to say that, yes, everything we are doing is perfectly legal; now shut up and get on with your job.

Some people have cited secret groups such as the freemasons or other secret groups as having a design to take over and control the world; but hang on, we are already under control! We just call it democracy because it sounds better. But you just try speaking out against your government or trying to create real change in the world and you will see how much of a democracy you live in.

For too long, we have been observers of pain and suffering. We like to paint it, film it, write books and plays about it but now is the time to do something about it. For most of you reading this it will probably be a scary proposition; but don't worry, this isn't about demonstrating on the streets, or forcefully overthrowing the government. Oh no, that would be "illegal". What we are talking about is drawing on our inner creativity to find a way out of the mess we have left ourselves in.

One meaning of the word "create," is, "to bring into existence," and what we are talking about here is bringing ourselves into existence, to *wake up* from the happy gas that has been pumped around the cities of the world, so we think this is how things are, and how things should be. This isn't how life should be, this is a man-made illusion. We have got so far away from how things really are, that we don't know what is real anymore and what is not.

**

In our explorations and discussions throughout this book, you will notice two themes coming up again and again, and that is awareness and insight. If you have neither, then you are asleep.

I don't want to change the world, and I don't want to change you. I just want to help you wake up. "But what if I don't want waking up?" says you. Don't worry that's just the happy gas talking!

We are not trying to create an ideal world here, there is no such thing. We are not trying to create a perfect world, there is no such thing. What we are trying to do is to create. To create a space for just a fraction of a second that allows your mind to say: "Hey! Wait a minute..." And that's all we are trying to create here – nothing more. No revolutions; they just cause pain and misery, and all that happens is one controlling organisation is replaced by another controlling organisation. Think about it for a minute or two.

The world has been in some state of war and suffering for many thousands of years and we can see the same thing happening throughout history. But don't take my word for it. Go down to your local library open a history book, and you can see for yourselves.

Throughout history, we can see that when people have tried to create something new they have either been the oppressor or brutally oppressed. What we have now is an opportunity to let ourselves shine, to free ourselves from all limitations, from all the constraints that have been put on us, by tradition, education, and social conditioning. We are not laboratory animals; we are homo sapiens, the most intelligent, creative species, in the known universe, let us not limit that creativity to a few works of art, a concert or two, and a magician with nothing up his sleeve.

We are creators. We have created so much in such a little space of time, whether good or bad. Let us turn to ourselves, and create compassion and love in ourselves; and let that light spread forth and touch all creatures on earth. No government, nor any man can stop it once it starts. And the great thing about it is it's all *legal*! Don't be fooled by mind tricks anymore. You are too intelligent for that; aren't you?

Create the space.
Let insight in for one second
And now: Wake Up!

[Back to Index](#)

Credit Cards

1. *A card (usually plastic) that assures a seller that the person using it has a satisfactory credit rating and that the issuer will see to it that the seller receives payment for the merchandise delivered.*

Excuse me for asking, but has anyone noticed recently that you can't do anything without a credit card? And given that we use telephones and the internet to buy so much "stuff," it isn't surprising, it's just the way that payments have developed. Except, on the whole, you are buying things on credit (with someone else's money), unless you have a payment card with the right symbol on it, to take the money out of your bank account.

I don't have a credit card. I can't get one because I do not have an address where I have lived for the past X years. I rarely operate a bank account, do not have a full time job, and I will not pass their computer scoring test.

I'm sure none of you *really* think about your credit cards, you just accept that this is something you need to have in order to get on in the world. It probably doesn't even occur to you that the person you have borrowed from (even if you pay it back on time every month) is a money lender, the same as the loan sharks who operate in back streets, and charge massive amounts of interest.

This loan shark has a smiling face, a glossy brochure, a massive advertising campaign, and a huge clientele. They may not threaten to break your legs if you don't pay them back, but they will attempt to ruin your life by making sure you can never borrow again. And given that our whole life is based around buying things we can't afford, this is could be a major blow to most people.

So why do you need them? Well, when you first get the card, there's a good credit limit on it so you can "Start Spending Immediately!" But just remember, you'll still have to start paying it back at the end of next month.

Some people are not good with money. I know from personal experience how easy it is to spend money on credit cards. You feel like an instant big shot, all that cash at your disposal, and you didn't have to work a single day for it. Fantastic! So it's straight down to the shops; new clothes, maybe a holiday, maybe a gift for your partner. It's so easy. Phone up. Apply on-line. A decision in sixty seconds. And if the computer gives you a good score, you're in business. A shiny new card with your chosen symbol will be delivered to your home, ready to start spending!

And then it's gone – you're up to your credit limit. Except now, the smiley, shiny credit card loan shark wants to start getting its money back. Can't pay? First you start getting the "courtesy" phone call, then the more insistent phone call, followed by the first letter, then the second letter, then the third letter, then the solicitor's letter, then the second solicitor's letter, followed finally by a summons, followed by a court appearance where the bailiffs will then be authorised to remove your "stuff" up to the value of the debt owed. Suddenly the whole smiley, shiny, plastic experience isn't so much fun. Gone are the images of happy people in the ads using their plastic; all you have now is worry and trouble in your life.

You may not believe it, but this is all your own fault; not the fault of the credit card companies who have made you to take a card under false pretences. It's not the fault of the system, nor the government. This is of your own making, or should I say, your brain's.

You see, when you got your new plastic, your brain gave you some great ideas about what to spend it on. You engaged with the pleasure, and before you knew it, you were down the shops spending. Yippee. Look at all the lovely new things I bought!

It is not that the money lenders are evil, they are just filling a demand. They know you are addicted to buying things. They know you just can't help buying things you *want* but can't afford. They're just helping you achieve that dream – albeit a false one.

Imagine it. All the trouble you get into because you just can't help doing what your brain tells you to do. Buying products you don't need, to get an instant hit of pleasure. Remember the pleasure hit you get from drugs, or alcohol, or a cigarette? Well it's the same with shopping. Especially if you can get something you don't have to save for. So there it is. Credit cards. A non-essential item in your wallet, used for buying pleasure. Until you have to pay it back...

Please think about this carefully with me. We get into debt because we want; we desire. There is no magical spell that forces you to do these things, just an inability to detach from a brain that has become addicted to certain behaviours. What do you think about it? Do you think "credit cards are essential," "I couldn't get by without them," "they are a necessary evil," "I don't have any problems with them, they're just more convenient." Would you agree with any of those statements?

I am sure many of you reading this don't get into debt. You just use the credit card to pay for goods, because (a) it's easier than carrying cash, (b) because you get points, and maybe (c) because you use it when paying over the internet. For you, the last few paragraphs were meaningless; probably because you are either very, very careful with credit and don't like paying interest, or you have plenty of money!

Whatever the case, there are definitely more people out there using credit cards as a way to get things they can't afford, and not paying off the balance every month, or these card companies wouldn't be in business. It's the interest you pay that pays for their fancy advertising, the offices all over the world, their staff, and their sponsorship of sporting and art events! How else do you think they get their money? You give it to them! Your inability to resist spending money keeps these giants in the money lending industry in business.

Your best bet is to cut all of these cards up. I did. Do you want to support a loan shark? To make him richer, while you get poorer?

In the beginning, you may find it difficult to come to terms with the fact that you won't be able to just put things on your silver, gold, or platinum card; that you won't be able to show off to your friends with your impressive array of shiny plastic. The shiny piece of plastic which *obviously* means that you are of a higher status than everyone else. Why? Because only people with excellent credit ratings get access to the exclusive club of being able to borrow, borrow, borrow!

What an achievement. What a remarkable step forward in the progress of the human race! An ability to borrow money, which resulted from a favourable result in a computer software program. Think about how absurd this is. Our success as humans is measured by a credit scoring program.

Without a good credit rating, you can't do anything these days. Well, that's what they tell you, but actually what it means is, you can't borrow! These days, everything is done on credit; from houses to cars – all expensive items. And the only way the companies can get you to buy them, is to loan you the money! How many people do you think can afford to buy even a small new car with cash? What about a house? That would be ridiculous; no normal, hard working family could afford to pay cash for a house. They would never be able to save up the amount of money needed.

We will cover housing in more detail in another topic but suffice to say that giving up credit cards will not break the cycle of debt we all find ourselves in straight away, but it's a good start to ridding ourselves of something that is chaining us to misery.

From a historical point of view, credit cards are a new thing, and so is credit scoring. Both have only come into existence in the last 40 years or so, and wouldn't exist without computers being able to check on people and their financial history.

So how did we pay for things before we had credit cards? Well, it will probably come as no surprise to you that after the second world war, people were pretty poor. They had little; economies of the world were decimated by war (except those companies who supplied the technology and weaponry for the war, who seemed to become rich, funnily enough).

People were not addicted to shopping, they bought what they could afford; mainly simple things they needed, like food and to pay bills, with a little left over for clothing and other items they needed. You notice I use the word *need* here, because although there may have been desire, they couldn't buy anything they didn't have cash for.

As economies were slowly rebuilt, and people became richer (in the westernised economies) they were encouraged to spend, spend, spend; and spend they did! The governments told people it was their right. The economy was booming and so it was only *right* that people could buy what they wanted when they wanted it. The only problem was, they still needed to earn the cash before they could buy it. So, fuelled by the desire to "liberate" people from not getting what they wanted when they wanted it, the credit card was born.

Suddenly, people could buy things they also *wanted*, and the more they spent, the more the economy grew. They wanted stuff, the companies supplied it, everybody was happy; and when people are spending, the government is happy. Win-win. The employees are happy because they have jobs, because people want to buy their companies' products. The employers are happy because the more they sell the more money they made. The government is happy because not only do they get the employees and employers tax contributions, they also get the sales tax from all the goods they were buying! Wow! Life sure is sweet! All fuelled by borrowing at outrageous rates of interest.

Loans were something people thought about very carefully before taking, but credit cards just involved filling out an anonymous form, and waiting a few days until your new piece of shiny came in the post. Borrowing without borrowing. A subtle loan, I would call it.

The use of credit cards proliferated throughout the world as the most acceptable currency for everything, from renting a car, to paying for a hotel room, and paying for dinner amongst other things. It also meant you didn't have to worry about carrying cash on you all the time. This has worked well in the credit card companies' favour; after all, who would carry around two thousand dollars in cash with them at all times? Well, with a credit card you can, enabling you to impulse buy whenever you feel like it.

"Hmm, I really fancy that new wide screen television, but I haven't got any cash."

"Oh Yes You Have!" shouts the credit card.

"Oh yes!" says you. "I can afford it, I have a credit card."

"While you're at it," shouts the credit card, "why don't you buy that flashy dvd player as well, you've still got plenty of credit left!"

Instant gratification. Win-win. You get what you want, the retailer gets a sale, and the credit card company hopes you can't pay it back by the end of the month!

But let's stop looking at the negative. It can't be all bad, can it? And anyway, how the heck am I supposed to pay for my cheap flight online? How can I pay for my hotel when I am in a country where I feel uncomfortable carrying cash in case I get robbed? Surely for this alone, it is a good thing?

I can see the positive side of such a system, although it has encouraged many more cases of fraud. Every year millions (maybe billions) is stolen from peoples credit cards, by various methods. Somebody has to pay for all this fraud, and it's sure not going to be the chief executives of the card companies, it's going to be you and me.

So how do we embrace the word-wide system which relies on credit cards for guarantee of payment, without borrowing money?

Part of the attraction for retailers to accept these cards is that once they have your number, they can subsequently charge any outstanding amounts to your card afterwards, such as if you run up a bill at a hotel, or rent a car, but most other items we buy are one-off payments.

What we need is a way of carrying cash that is in an electronic format for convenience and personal security, but is prepaid rather than borrowing the money. What could we possibly use that enables us to do that? Oh yes! It already exists. It's called your debit card, and your lovely bank will issue you one of these so you can access your own money! You may even choose to use a pre-pay credit card which requires no bank account. You just have to ask.

It may not be the best solution, but it's an instant way to stop borrowing money just so you can pay for a flight or something else on the internet (something I imagine will continue to expand as a preferred method for purchasing goods).

Of course, it would be nice if there was a global payment system that was run on a not-for-profit basis. "Don't be ridiculous!" shout the economists. But why not? The only people who would suffer are the credit card companies and their well paid ad agencies. It's not such a big deal. Who would run it? Who would manage it? These are questions we must pose ourselves. There is no easy solution to a system that has been in place for many years, although new methods of payment are springing up on the web all the time, but most of them still require you to load them up with cash from your credit card, so they are not an ideal solution either.

Like many difficult tasks in life, this will be hard, but ultimately worth freeing ourselves from. A mind concerned with debt will never have the space to contemplate anything else. Debt consumes you with worry. There is no place for anything else. It is time to break free of the smiles and the shiny plastic enticing you to spend, spend, spend. It's not your money, it never was and never will be.

So, until we can come up with a new method for payments which is not controlled by several loan sharks around the world, switch to using your debit card. Use your own money. You never know, saving for things you really want may be an enlightening experience, as you will have to practice that long forgotten art. Patience.

"BOO!" shouts you, "Stop spoiling our Fun. We like credit cards, we want them, we need them, they are part of who we are. It's not fair that we should think of giving them up."

Can you not see how quickly and so intensely we have become so addicted to credit cards? They've only

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

been going for about forty years and the whole developed world is addicted. Don't worry, if you come from a less economically prosperous country, just give it a few years and soon you will be able to experience the pleasure of spending money you don't have. I bet you can't wait.

[Back to Index](#)

Crime

1. *(criminal law) an act punishable by law; usually considered an evil act*

We all know what a crime is don't we? A crime is something that is against the law. It is against the law because the people and their representatives believe it is something wicked (*morally bad in principle or practice*) and it should not go unpunished. This has been the view for many thousands of years in civilised and uncivilised society.

Offences are defined as crimes against the person like robbery, violence, or murder, or against the government as in tax evasion, treason, and the suchlike. Punishments for committing "offences" vary from country to country, city to city, town to town, and person to person. A punishment for breaking and entering into a house might be a three month prison sentence in one country, five years in another, and in another, a public flogging. You can never be sure what punishment your going to get when you commit a crime.

If you murder someone in one part of the united states, you will receive a life sentence, but if you murder someone in a different state, you will be tied to a chair and an electric current passed through your body or given a lethal injection, until you are dead. Either way, you'll be killed.

But enough of the punishment, let's talk about the crime. Everyone will agree it's horrible to come into your house and find your precious goods stolen, or have your wallet stolen in the street, or even worse be beaten up. Even worse than that (which I'm sure the victims would agree if they could talk) is being murdered. To be stabbed with a knife that tears away at your flesh and organs, or be shot with a bullet that explodes inside you is the most heinous of crimes, wouldn't you agree? Not paying your taxes, cheating large companies, defrauding insurance companies, and other "crimes" where no one gets physically hurt are rarely seen as being offences by the perpetrators.

So who are these criminals? Who are the people who roam our streets looking to cause mischief to their fellow humans? Are they violent, unfeeling monsters as portrayed by the media, or are they people in need of our compassion and help? The overwhelming view amongst the general public is that these people are thugs, and deserve nothing from us. "They should lock them up and throw away the key," I hear some of you say, and I can understand why you think like that.

If you have ever been raped, attacked, robbed, or ripped off by someone, you want revenge – which you call justice. It seems only natural to want to punish the person who has stolen from you or wronged you, doesn't it?

We don't even need laws to make some things illegal, there are certain things which we naturally take offence to, like people stealing from you, or raping you, or your children. It is lucky for the criminals that we now have civilised courts and not the old fashioned kangaroo courts (*an irregular unauthorized court*), where they may find themselves dangling on the end of a rope for any offence!

The legal system has been modernised somewhat in the last two thousand years, and now there is a proper process to go through when trying a prisoner. They now have rights, and in most countries, a prisoner is considered innocent until proven guilty. Even if a prisoner is found guilty most countries do not kill them; they are normally sent to prison for a specific amount of time (at the cost of the taxpayer - you) and enjoy a reasonable life there until they are released to inevitably do the same thing again. Some people think it might actually be better to kill them and save ourselves the trouble of housing them in prison, then having to deal with the aftermath of them re-offending. It would definitely be cheaper! Criminals are a real menace to us, aren't they?

- A. They cause fear and mayhem on the streets.
- B. They cost insurance companies billions in claims from people who have had things stolen.
- C. They cost us millions for lawyers' fees and judges' salaries. They cause us to build courthouses at great expense, prisons at even greater expense, and then, finally, when they are convicted, require massive amounts of money to keep them locked up!
- D. Then we release them into the community assign them a probation officer which costs money.
- E. Then they re-offend.
- F. Go back to A.

And that's not even taking into account the emotional scars left behind when someone is a victim of crime. Looking at it, it is really easy to get angry; and believe me, it does make me angry when I see the blatant disregard, not for laws – which are man-made – but for fellow humans. This is not about the right of the

individual to live a life free from crime either; it is about trying to understand how one human (*a member of the species homo sapiens*) can make another human (*a member of the species homo sapiens*) suffer. That is what I would like to discuss with you here.

Every year, governments threaten to get tough on the causes of crime; they bandy around figures to show us that street robbery is down 0.243% this quarter, murder is down 1.983% this week, burglary is down 2.94221% today. But no one, including the government, knows how to get rid of crime – not completely. They can reduce it, but they can't eradicate it.

So what causes people to commit crime?

Forget that there are laws for a moment... What causes one individual, or gang, to think it is perfectly acceptable to attack someone else, beat them savagely, steal their wallet, and leave them for dead? What causes a man, however enraged he is, to stab another man to death? What causes a young boy to grab a brick and throw it through the window of a car to steal its worthless cd player?

Let me ask you another question. When is it acceptable to steal from someone else? When you are starving? When you want what they have? When they can well afford it? Are there degrees of acceptability in crime? What about when you stab someone? Maybe because they looked at you the "wrong" way? Because they were talking to your girlfriend? Because they were of a different race? Because you hated him? When? You tell me. What makes you fight on the street where I don't? What makes you steal from someone when I don't? What makes you kill when I don't?

At a trial, many excuses or mitigating factors are put up by the defence. He was broke; he was going through a bad patch; he had just split up with his girlfriend; he was intoxicated/on drugs at the time. The excuses go on and on. I have never seen anyone go into court and say "Yes, I did it; I take personal responsibility for it," they always try to weasel out of it, don't they? "It wasn't me. I didn't do it; I've got an alibi." They have committed a crime against someone, but when it comes to taking responsibility for it, they are nowhere to be seen. We have to use many hours of police time to hunt them down.

They are happy to do the crime, but not happy to do the time!

"He had a very troubled childhood, your honour;" "he got in with a bad crowd, your honour;" "he promises never to do it again, your honour;" and there he stands, head hung low in an ill fitting suit to show respect to the judge (or to try to get a more lenient sentence).

He cuts a thoroughly pathetic figure as he stands there being judged for something he has done wrong. Outside the court he's a tough man, but in here he's meek and mild. "Yes, your honour;" "no, your honour;" "sorry about that, your honour;" "it'll never happen again, your honour;" "I'm a changed man, your honour."

I have never seen people go from such arrogant, aggressive individuals to people who will do anything to get out of going to jail. At least have the courage to stand up and say "I did it, he deserved it. I'm glad I did it." But they won't, because for most of them going to prison is an unattractive prospect, and being on the outside committing more crime is where they want to be.

"What about the one-off cases?" I hear you demand. "Those who really didn't mean it and will never do it again cases, don't put them in the same category as people who regularly commit crime." But as I well know, from my two or three court appearances in my youth, a crime's a crime.

The first time I went to court was for a breach of the peace, I think. I can't remember exactly, but I was drunk, about seventeen, and some people I knew in the town were fighting with a couple of policemen. I said something like "He's done nuffing le-t 'im go" or something to that incoherent effect about two hundred times to the police who were trying to bundle him into a police car. I was promptly arrested and spent the night in a police cell shouting "You bastards..." or something equally as pleasant. On the day of court I think I dressed up smartly, had my dad as support, and was fined a small amount of money as well as bound over to keep the peace for a year.

My second court appearance was for a similar drunken offence, although this time I was arrested for something more serious. I was drunk at some girl's parents' house, her boyfriend turns up. He says something, I go and grab a knife (a knife! I can't believe I did that), he and the girl's brother throw me out, and as I leave I stick the knife in the front door! I was promptly arrested, fined, and bound over to keep the peace.

The third and final court appearance (all within two years), was because the ex-boyfriend of the girl in case two decided I was responsible for his break up with said girl. I was drunk (some pattern emerging?), and

he put me in a headlock. We were both promptly arrested, although this time in court I was found not guilty!

That was the end of my court appearances, but I often wonder what would have happened if I had stayed hanging round with the same crowd. They were only interested in fighting and drinking, and I wanted to be part of their group. They were the cool group in town and I hadn't been in any groups before. I have never even had a fight in my life, and was only interested in the drinking and the women that hung around the group.

For me, being part of the group changed my personality enough to allow myself to do things that would normally go against my conscience. But being drunk all the time probably didn't help either. I conformed to the group ideal of not caring about anything. I was angry at my parents when they tried to stop me going out with the group, and I stole from my mother to buy alcohol and cigarettes; I wasn't myself at all. Yet the one thing I never did was take personal responsibility for my actions. I always blamed the others. Inside my mind, I was still a sweet little boy, but on the outside I was just an angry aggressive drunk.

This was my short brush with crime; and as I left the group, I never came into contact with the court system again (except for a few speeding and parking fines). I can see how easy it is to fall in with the wrong crowd and embark on a lifetime of crime.

Years ago they tried to profile the "look" of a criminal. What type of eyes, ears, nose, they had as if there was a genetic blueprint that caused people to become criminals. They were almost saying that if you looked a certain way, you would almost definitely go into crime. Having seen the photos of some criminals you can see where they were coming from! But an ugly man is not a criminal any more than an attractive man is a saint!

Poverty and unemployment are always touted as being major contributors to the start of a career in crime, but that is only because people with no money and no job want the things people with money and a job have worked for. They feel aggrieved that someone else has the goods and they haven't. So what do they do? They take them. By force.

This isn't anything new. Throughout history, people have been stealing from each other and murdering each other. This is no modern epidemic, it's only because we have media that we know so much about it now.

There have always been poor people. My grandparents (and my parents) came from quite poor working class families in Glasgow. They had no fineries, but they had jobs and they were happy because they had each other. There are many poor people living around the world, but that doesn't make them thieves. There are many unemployed people, but that doesn't make them bank robbers.

One key factor does seem to be environment. The place people live. If you live in an area where drugs are being dealt all the time, and you want to belong to a group, what sort of group will you belong to? If you live in an area where people are fighting all the time in gangs and you want to belong, what group will you fall into? Please think about it for a moment because this is important. All across the world, people with no money, low self-esteem, no value system, and personality problems are housed all together.

If you want to see evidence of environment as a key factor, just put ten gifted people together in a house and see what comes out of that. The more of the same type of people you put together the more of the same you will get out. If the predominant personality is violent, you will get more violence, if the predominant personality is peaceful, you will get more peace. Think about it. Does that make any sense to you?

There have been thousands of studies made, millions spent, trying to find out why people commit crime, and as it's still going on, we will have to assume they haven't found out! I think it would be a safe guess to say that money and interpersonal conflict is at the root of most crime.

People break into houses, cars, banks, shops, etc. to steal goods and money. They are desperate people who will do anything to get money. Some may have drug habits to fund, others may have gambling or alcohol addictions, but we must be clear that people are not stealing goods to keep them, but steal them to raise a few pounds.

For some people, this becomes a way of life, and they do not consider that they are doing anything wrong (except when they end up in court, and get sent to prison again). Many see the state as the system, and feel they are rebelling against it, most others just steal a car stereo to sell for ten pounds down the pub. Big deal.

Some obviously steal a lot more, but what are they achieving? A few extra pounds in their pockets. For what? Probably a new pair of trainers so they can look cooler than their mate.

It is this complete lack of awareness in themselves that makes theft so sad. That someone will risk everything for a few pounds amazes me. Stealing because of poverty? Don't make me laugh! In the west, if you can't get a job, you are funded by the government, which is funded by you the taxpayer, to help you get a job and be able to support yourself. For the wanna haves in the world this money isn't enough, so they go and steal more money from the other taxpayers, which is you, get caught, then spend a couple of years sitting around being fed, clothed, and housed, by, wait for it... *you*. They have a great life. They're in a win-win situation. You of course are in a lose-lose situation.

For people involved in violence, the motivation may be different, and may involve many different psychological problems (which by the way are all treatable in some way or another), but the outcome remains the same; only this time, people are physically injured or killed. But in the end, the criminal will be caught, taken through the legal process and if found guilty, sent off to prison at your expense. Lose-lose again for you.

But in the long term, the people who get involved in crime are in the lose-lose situation. The sheer stress of it; the constant dealings with people in authority; being treated as if you are less than human. As far as authority is concerned, you are not to be afforded the usual treatment reserved for society, as you have broken society's rules. You will be punished to teach you a lesson, and this punishment serves as a warning to all others who wish to break the law that... Blah, blah, blah.

An open letter to the criminally minded

Dear mr criminal

I would like to talk to you for a moment if I may, and ask you exactly why you do the things you do? Maybe your father didn't love you, maybe your parents didn't bring you up well and didn't give you proper values? Maybe your family are involved in crime? Maybe you think the only way to get money is not by working like everyone else, but by taking it from people who had to do jobs they didn't like to buy the things they wanted. Maybe you had a violent upbringing? Maybe you were abused? Maybe you just want to show off how tough you are to your mates? Maybe you were left by your girlfriend for another man, maybe you felt jealous, so you killed him. There are so many maybes, but the only certainty is you. You were involved in the acts that affected other people, you may have denied it at the time, but it was you.

Where is this life of yours headed? Back to prison? Back to a life behind bars, where you are not free to walk in the open country air; where you will not see a family grow up? Is this what millions of years of evolution has achieved? You, in prison, being fed, watered, and caged like a dangerous dog; unable to be let out of your cage because of what you might do?

It may be easier for us to turn you loose on a deserted island with other criminals and no support. Just you, them, and the island. What would you do there? Would you work together, and build a community, growing and harvesting fruits and vegetables, living together in peace. No, of course you wouldn't! You'd kill each other. Man to man, showing off all that testosterone. You'd be able to express your violent selves with no interference from anyone else, although this time you may not get out of it alive. Maybe we should send you back in time to when Man was just evolving; you might feel quite at home there. Although once again, I cannot guarantee you would get out alive.

No, I think you'd be better off here, where the people (from whom you stole or hurt) still offer you their compassion. If you think they don't, then maybe the people and their compassion (in the form of food that feeds you in prison) should remove their support and support a new bill to bring back executions. It is within the power of the people. Don't be so sure they wouldn't do it. Hanging for theft of a car radio. How would you feel then?

Maybe you think people are weak, and that's why you hurt them. Maybe you think you have the right to do it. Maybe you are like all other people, whom society supports, that think you are "entitled" to do and take whatever you like. Maybe, and just maybe you aren't aware of yourself. You are just so caught up in what you are doing you have no time to spend 0.005 seconds between the thought and the action. You're too busy with your career of violence and theft. But please stop to think for one moment.

Try to imagine how your life would be, free from these prison warders locking you in. Imagine a field on

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

a warm summers day; imagine yourself calm, no worries at all, free from chains, and the torment you must be in. Let go of this prison, this idea you have, that the only way to live is the life you have chosen. You can be free of this life, by letting love into your life, by letting light into your life, by letting passion, energy, joy, and creation in!

Face it, you will be only here on this planet for another few years. Roll forward to an image of you on your death bed. There you lie, in prison alone, no one to comfort you. You stole all you could, you hurt others all you could, for what? This? This lying on a prison bed, the end near. You were a tough man, everyone “respected” you, but now you’re about to die. Where did you go wrong? What do you regret? Do you shed a tear for your wasted life? Do not! You do not need to feel sorry for yourself, I do not feel sorry for you.

Now roll backward to right NOW. You are not on your death bed, you are here. Now. You have the chance right now to give up this life. To take a different path; one as yet unknown, and lead a happy fulfilling life, not one surrounded by concrete and steel. Walk away. Change your environment. Pack a bag. Leave right now. The future awaits you.

*your friend in life
alan*

Surely this is a no-brainer? If crime costs us a fortune, and we are not ready to string up every criminal, we must offer them our compassion. Nothing else has worked, will work, or can work. Remember the only way to defeat violence of any kind is to fight violence with compassion, which is not fighting at all. We must extend the hand of compassion to all. Not just those who need it or we think are worthy of it.

Crimes against us are made by our own brothers, homo sapiens; and although it saddens us and angers us to see it happen, we must extend the hand of friendship to them and help them find the way. Not our way, but a way driven through awareness of themselves, love, compassion, and empathy for all who inhabit this planet. It is possible. We must never give up on our fellow humans, for if we do, we must surely give up on ourselves.

[Back to Index](#)

Criticism

- 1. Disapproval expressed by pointing out faults or shortcomings*
- 2. A serious examination and judgement of something*

*You're useless, you'll never pass.
You're always doing it wrong, why don't you learn?
You're such an idiot, I've explained it to you a thousand times.
Why don't you think! You never think about what you're doing.
You're hopeless, you'll never get it right.*

We all do it, don't we? We just can't help ourselves. We have to do it. We constantly pick at people's faults, especially those closest to us; the ones we love. Our children, our parents, our brothers and sisters. We don't generally criticise friends or colleagues or people we don't know well to their faces, but you can be sure we will criticise them to somebody else. Why do we do it? What is it that makes us want to hurt the ones we care about?

I don't know if you have ever heard the term "constructive criticism," where something is evaluated seriously, and pointers given where improvements could be made? Most people welcome constructive criticism, as it gives them a different viewpoint (as the main aim is to help, not hurt). But general criticism is not constructive, it is destructive, especially to the self-esteem of the person on the receiving end. In fact, it's no more than an glorified insult; although parents would say they are doing for the good of the child, by pointing out their mistakes.

Insult

1. A rude expression intended to offend or hurt

Let's look at this more closely. If I am having a dinner party and my wife burns the pie in the oven, what am I likely to say? Would I say "Don't worry about it, it's unimportant, we'll have something else," and joke about it? or would I say "You idiot, I can't believe you burnt the apple pie, what were you thinking, you've ruined the dinner party now, what are our guests going to think?"

As if your wife doesn't feel bad enough already, you have to make it worse by insulting her and making her feel even worse – thereby inflaming the situation.

Are we angry, or are we just embarrassed by the person's actions? Do we think, that because they are part of our family, it reflects badly on us? If my wife is so stupid to burn the apple pie, what will people think of me for choosing her as a wife? If my son keeps getting low grades in school, will it make me look like a bad father.

Criticism gets worse the more someone repeats the mistake. If your wife burns the apple pie every time, the insults get more and more personal, not just about the apple pie, but about everything. "You're always doing something wrong;" "You've never been a good cook;" "Why can't you do something right for once in your life?" Ouch! That really hurts doesn't it? Your wife, who knows has a problem with cooking apple pie, but nonetheless tries hard, now can't do anything right in her life.

People who criticise normally have to apologise, and say it was just in the heat of the moment; that really, they just feel sorry you're not achieving your best and you know they are capable of better things; you only said it because you love them! Nice way of showing love isn't it? "Why can't you do something right for once in your life?"

Now, let's imagine your wife says to you "Ok, next dinner party, *you* bake the apple pie!" You know you're not a good cook, but you try to follow the recipe nonetheless. How would you feel if your wife starting telling you you were an idiot, that you were doing it wrong? "Why are you doing it like this, that's not the way to do it!" You would feel pretty low about yourself, and probably start to get angry. "Look, I'm trying my best, all right? Just leave me alone."

What if you burnt it, and she started saying, "You're always doing something wrong;" "You've never been a good cook;" "Why can't you do something right for once in your life?" How would you feel? The criticism seems disproportionate to what's happened, doesn't it? Almost as if the person has been saving up criticisms for a long time, and is just waiting for an opportunity to use them.

We previously discussed that criticisms are generally reserved for family members, and people you love. I would guess it's probably because you couldn't get away with speaking like that to anyone else.

Imagine for a moment that a close friend comes round to help you prepare for your dinner party and says, "don't worry, I'll bake the apple pie; I'm not a great cook, but I'll give it a go." You let them do it, and at the end, they apologise, and say they've ruined it, what do you say? "You're such an idiot, why can't you do

things properly? You've ruined my dinner party, I can't believe you're so stupid!" because that's what you would have said to your wife. Or are you more likely to say "Oh well, don't worry about it, you tried your best, we'll just have to do something else" and laugh about it?

Of course you wouldn't insult them. They came to help you, and made a mistake, that's all, it's not the end of the world. The thing you have to realise is that no one sets out to annoy you or upset you by doing things wrong, they just can't do them, that's all. So instead of criticising someone, why don't we offer a little help, a little advice.

"Let's see if we can do it together;" or "come here and I'll try to help you with it."

If you know that your wife is bad at baking apple pie, don't just criticise her, all it does is lowers her self-esteem, makes her angry, and creates bad feeling between you. Surely it's not an expression of love, is it?

If you haven't got anything nice to say don't say anything at all

I'm not perfect, are you? I make mistakes. I wish I was better at things, but we can't all be good at everything, can we? We try our best, and sometimes we fall short of the mark. Maybe we need a little more training or a little more encouragement, or maybe our brain will never grab the concept of baking apple pie, and that's ok too. It's not like the world depends on it, although sometimes we are made to feel as if we have made a critical mistake in calculating the trajectory for the return of the space shuttle. So why do we constantly criticise when we are not perfect either?

Perfectionism

1. A disposition to feel that anything less than perfect is unacceptable

Children bear the brunt of a lot of it. The imperfect parents hoping to give birth to a genius. All the parents' dreams, hopes, ambitions, and desires, wrapped up into a little bundle of joy. The child doesn't stand a chance. From the moment he gargles his first words, to the time he takes his first steps, you're with him all the way! He's the one that's going to be intelligent. A great writer, poet, classical musician; a famous doctor, an architect who designs the next eiffel tower. You get him private lessons in music, a tutor comes to the house for mathematics, you are pinning your hopes on this boy, your genius. And then you get his report card from school...

Must try harder...
Limited ability...
Could achieve more...
Shows little promise...

What? How can this be? You were pinning all your hopes on this child, how could he let you down like this, after all you've done for him, he's had plenty of opportunity, he should have done better.

"Have you seen your report card, it's terrible; you haven't put any effort at all in this year, after all the money your father and I have spent on private lessons. How can you do this to us? If you don't stick in harder at school, you'll never get a good job, you'll end up doing a dead end job, and your father and I won't be here to help you, you know, you'll be on your own. Then you'll be sorry you didn't stick in harder at school. You'd better stick in harder next year, or they'll be no going out for you after school, no tv, no friends coming over. You better buck up your ideas. You're wasting your talents, throwing away a golden opportunity. Well, what have you got to say for yourself young man?"

"Sorry..."

"Sorry's not good enough; your father and I want to see a definite improvement immediately. I want you doing your homework as soon as you come in from school. I'm going to talk to your teacher about extra lessons after school. I just can't understand why you're not taking this seriously, this is your future we're talking about, Do you hear me?"

“Yes mum. Sorry.”

“Well, let’s hope next year is better, but I wouldn’t want to be in your shoes when your father comes home, and I show him this report card, he’s going to be very angry.”

Great! That’s just what you need. You’re 11 years old. You’re just starting to grow up, your brain and your body are still developing, you’re still forming your world-view, and the two people who are supposed to love you constantly criticise you. You don’t know why you’re bad at maths, you actually don’t like playing the piano, you want to play the guitar; and you never want to be an architect, you want to be in a rock band. And why not? You are 11 years old!

Parents are the greatest at criticism, aren’t they? Dissatisfied with their own lives, wishing they could have been a famous doctor, architect, or classical pianist, and transferring those unfulfilled dreams on to you. Thanks mum!

There’s a lot of different pressures when you’re growing up, finding your place in the world, going through puberty, and the last thing a child needs is to be told what he’s doing is wrong. “We’re only saying it because we love you.” Nonsense. You’re only saying it because you can. You wouldn’t say it to anyone else’s child would you? “You’re useless, you’re stupid, why don’t you stick in at school more!.” The child’s parents may have a thing or two to say about that don’t you think?

So it’s definitely not about love – because love is unconditional. When you love someone, you accept them for who they are, and accept the mistakes they make. Let’s stop and reflect on that for a moment, because I think that is applicable to children and adults too. How many of us could really say we love someone unconditionally; with all their faults, and imperfections? For that is what love truly is. When we love unconditionally, we cannot criticise.

When the child is all grown up, there’s no one left to criticise, so we criticise each other; and when the child gets married, he criticises his own family. In order to stop this destructive cycle we need to be aware of ourselves; of how we speak to our loved ones; so even when we are frustrated, we do not resort to insults, for that is not love. All we can do is offer advice, help, and guidance.

It does not help a person to be criticised, it doesn’t make them try harder; it just makes them feel bad about themselves. If you really want to help someone (and they actively want your help), you have to take time to understand the problem the person is facing, and decide whether you have the necessary skills to help them find the best solution. Then again, some things are so unimportant in life, it’s better to just let them go, everybody makes mistakes, even you.

If you haven’t got anything nice to say don’t say anything at all
You don’t like it when someone criticises you

[Back to Index](#)

Cruelty

1. *A cruel act; a deliberate infliction of pain and suffering*
2. *Feelings of extreme heartlessness*
3. *The quality of being cruel and causing tension or annoyance*

Children can be very cruel, can't they? They taunt and they tease other children in the playground. They call them horrible names, they persistently pick on children who are weaker than them, and find more and more ways to exploit any weakness they find. Although children can be cruel to each other, they can also do the same to their parents; saying things that are so hurtful, they make their parents cry.

I remember (and am still reminded by mother) the time at junior school when I forgot my drink, and my mother had the audacity to bring it to me in front of all of my school friends. I can still see it now. Crossing the road with the class, and hearing my mother call out:

"Alan? Alan?"

"What are do you doing here mum?" I said. "Go away. I don't want to see you, I hate you! Go away!" and all she did was bring me my drink!

*Sticks and Stones may break my bones
but words will never hurt me*

I don't know where that old playground saying comes from, but I think whoever wrote it missed something quite profound. With physical bruising you can see the suffering; and although mental suffering is invisible to the naked eye, words can, and do in fact hurt you. "Children are just children," you say; and yes, most of the cruel children grow up to be "normal" individuals, who don't display any sign of their cruel past. But what I want to investigate is whether this cruelty that children show to each other, or to their parents, is just a normal process of growing up, or a sign of something much deeper, something that lies within all of us just waiting for the opportunity to unleash itself.

The development of the child's mind is a complex one, with new connections being made all the time, and indeed many children right through to late teenagers, exhibit this characteristic of the ability to be cruel, and say and do things that perhaps they are not even aware of. Perhaps it's just because the young mind is not mature enough to understand the effects words have on us? What do you think?

Do you have children? Do they say cruel things to you? "I hate you mum;" "I wish you'd just go away;" "I wish I never been born, I hate you?" It must be awful to have brought a beautiful child into the world, nourished it, loved it, protected it, taught it; and finally when it was old enough to speak, it tells you it hates you. Nice! That is the thanks you get for all that effort. Do you think we should accept that this is normal; that this is just a small blip in the long process of growing up?

Is there a point to being cruel? If so, I would dearly love to know what it is! It seems to serve no other purpose than deliberately hurting another (oh yes, that's the point!), and throughout life, we can see that adults all have this same potential to be cruel to each other, and also to children.

As with all our actions, it originates in the mind. It is our own brain which comes up with the idea to be cruel, which is sad. Why are we not born with a mind that is already loving and compassionate for all beings? Maybe love and compassion are not inherent; maybe they are just learned behaviours; but I do not believe that to be true. We hurt each other to deflect feelings that are intolerable to ourselves, when our own minds are in conflict and it is understandable to some extent why it happens. I am hurting and I do not want to feel hurt, so I transfer it to another to make myself feel better. But the mind is selfish. It doesn't care if it hurts others, it is only interested in itself.

So maybe we should be a bit more understanding of people who are cruel, and instead of judging them try to help them solve the problems in their minds. It is a hard thing to do when you are on the receiving end of someone's cruel comments, but by showing our love and compassion for them, and asking them a simple question: "What's wrong, do you want to talk about it?" perhaps we can help them resolve whatever conflict is going on; and in return save ourselves from further cruelty. Our compassion could be said to be selfish, but we must protect ourselves as well.

Adults, who grow into cruel husbands or wives, have similarly unresolved emotional conflict in their minds, and may not even be aware they are in conflict, that is why it is so important that we become aware of ourselves, of the movement of our minds, of ourselves in relationship with others. It is vital.

If a child learns to become aware of himself early on in life, there is less chance he will be cruel. Do you understand what I am trying to say here? To ask a child to become aware of his feelings will teach him that he cannot just transfer the pain to someone else, parent, peer, or indeed anyone he meets. The reason the

parent seems to bear the brunt of most cruel comments is more to do with the amount of time they spend together, than the child actually hating the parent.

We must help the child to deal with whatever he or she is going through rather than just getting annoyed with them, sending them to their room without dinner, or just sitting in a corner crying to ourselves, wondering how the child we brought into the world with love, cared for, fed, and clothed could say these terrible things to us.

I know it is only “natural” for us to feel hurt, but we must use our minds with intelligence; and see that the only reason for them to be cruel is because (a) they are hurting inside, and cannot deal with it, and (b) do not yet have the awareness of themselves to understand that their words and actions are hurting others.

Why do you hurt me?

I don’t know about you, but my mother never asked me this question; she either shouted at me or just burst into tears. Personally, I could never see what all the fuss was about. I needed to get something off my chest, and I did. I didn’t care what I said as long as she stopped going on at me. In my twisted thinking it seemed the right thing to do.

I have said some pretty cruel things to my girlfriends in the past too, and when you are angry, or upset, and want to feel better, you find the weakest point in the armour to attack. “Yeah, but at least I’m not as fat as you!” knowing full well that this is something with which the other partner already has low self-esteem.

When we are on the attack, we always go for the weak spot. It makes sense if you want victory in a battle, but not when you are dealing with someone who loves you. We find weapons to attack with that we know are guaranteed to pierce the armour. We get our fatal blow in before our enemy has a chance to retaliate.

But remember, this is someone you supposedly love you are talking to, not an enemy in battle – but the outcome is the same. You defeat your enemy, but at great cost. You may have won and you may feel good about it, but your opponent is hurt so much emotionally, they may find it hard to forgive you.

I know from personal experience, that using cruel words to my girlfriends was detrimental to my relationship with them, but never once did they ask me “Why do you hurt me?” If they had actually asked me that question, I would probably have had no answer, as I was acting, not out of love and compassion, but out of the need to win, at all costs.

It was only through the development of self-awareness and self-knowledge, that I transcended this ability to be cruel. I began to see it as something inhuman, something that does not exist in the animal kingdom either, and I started to watch myself as I spoke with others. Any time I could feel the urge to score a cheap point in an argument using something I knew would hurt them, I paid close attention to my mind, and asked myself the question: Would I hurt someone I love? And believe me, we are always more cruel to the ones we supposedly love.

When it gets physical

We have all heard stories in the press about parents being cruel to their children. There are horror stories of parents locking their children in cupboards, starving them, burning them with cigarettes or other objects, and fortunately it doesn’t seem to be reported all that often, but once is too much, so we need to investigate why an adult would deliberately cause harm to his or her child. What thought processes are going on in the mind. Maybe we should ask them?

Me: Why did you burn your child? From the reports it seems that, before the child died, it had over 50 burn marks on its body.

Parent: I ‘loved’ my child, but she just wouldn’t stop crying. I tried everything to calm her down, but she was always a crier. The noise was in my head, I just had to make it stop. I didn’t mean to hurt her; I just wanted her to shut up.

Me: But you knew you were hurting a defenceless infant, who could not fight back?

Parent: You don’t know what it’s like. Living there alone with a child crying all day long, I had to get her to stop, do you understand? She was driving me up the wall.

And from that last statement we can see what is really going on. Although the cruelty was deliberate, it was probably not through a direct thought such as: “I will hurt that child,” or “I will burn them with a cigarette.”

Most of our actions are transferred from the pain in our own mind onto someone weaker, that way, the mind knows it is guaranteed some kind of relief from the pain it is going through. Clearly, the woman could not cope with the noise of the infant. She had many other problems in her life and this just tipped her over the edge.

I believe that all humans are compassionate and loving in their nature, although they have the potential to be violent and cruel when their own biological needs are not being met, or they are suffering themselves. We must have compassion for others who are suffering, lest they hurt others through it, and we must try to help them deal with their emotional turmoil – but first we have to deal with our own.

The next time you have an argument, or feel like being physically cruel to someone, you must realise that you are the one who is in pain. You must become aware that you are only being cruel to transfer the uncomfortable feelings to someone else. Do you follow? Before you hurt another with your words or your actions, become instantly aware of the feelings surging through your body. At this point you must withdraw, do you understand? You are about to alter your life or someone else’s life by the words you are about to speak, or the actions you are about take. I am talking to you, the children, and you, the adults, together, for children’s cruelty becomes adult cruelty.

You must go somewhere quiet, if only for a moment, and try to understand what feeling you were about to transfer to someone else. There are no excuses here; no explanations – just awareness. You are the one who is in pain, you are the one who is about to spread misery with your words. You must resolve the conflict in you.

Be aware. Be aware. Be aware. That is all you can do. Talk to someone about your feelings; a friend or a counsellor you trust. If you have the urge to be cruel, then your brain is knocking on your door, telling you “Hey! I have some unresolved stuff here, and if you don’t help me resolve it, I’ll do it on my own.”

Don’t wait for your brain to act. Be aware that one day your brain will use cruelty to solve its own problems. It doesn’t care if it hurts someone else, after all, it’s *you* who will take the blame!

[Back to Index](#)

Culture

1. *A particular society at a particular time and place*
2. *All the knowledge and values shared by a society*
3. *The attitudes and behaviour that are characteristic of a particular social group or organization*

On our journey of exploration into the human being, we have discussed many topics. All individually important; but as we start to piece the puzzle together, it is time to discuss what happens when Man is not only individually conditioned, but when he acts as part of the largest tribal group – a country. The question I want to ask us all here is whether the conditioning becomes the culture, and if so, how do we find the individual again? Is he lost forever to national identity, or can he resurface, free of conditioning, free to think clearly with true intelligence?

Do I think as an individual, or is my thinking a result of the collective culture of the country I inhabit?

I would like you to think about this, slowly and carefully. We are asking whether the inhabitants of each country have been passed on some genetic quality which makes them talk loudly, have family values, be aggressive, materialistic, emotional, or angry; or are they simply conditioned by being in the same country as others with the same tendencies?

We have already seen how children are conditioned early on in life by their parents and their teachers amongst others, so is it not possible that the culture is simply the result of individuals being conditioned en-masse?

To give you a simple example: We have often heard talk of the italians being emotional and expressive, prone to hot-headedness, and also fairly aggressive whilst driving. Surely each one of them can't be so hot-headed? Surely each person does not have an inherent aggressive quality? Some people have said that like the spanish, the italians are like that because of the hot weather in the country. Well, I don't know about that, perhaps weather could be an influence, but as I am not an expert, I don't want to jump to conclusions!

If each child is born with a natural mind, then why does he become like all the others in his society, but not like people from other nations? If we rule out genetics as the primary cause, our next port of call has to be the artificial creation of national boundaries. So on this side of the fence, we are french, with all our french conditioning, and on the other side of the fence are the italians with their italian conditioning, and so on. Are we clear so far?

Over many thousands of years these borders have been closed more and more tightly to ensure the french stay french, and the italians stay italian, and over time the populations of all the countries has grown considerably.

Before the creation of these national borders, there would have been tribal borders; and then as the tribes grew, these borders would be expanded, in part because of the need to acquire more territory to support these growing numbers. The few would become many.

But the initial conditioning must have started with very few people indeed; and as we have seen in so many other topics, it is the leaders – political and religious – who have done the conditioning.

They wanted people to behave in a certain way; to conform and obey the rules. They issued orders about how the people were to be treated, how they were to be educated, what they would read, what they could speak about, and what they could not; and how they were expected to behave. But remember, this all started with small tribes, where a small number of people were conditioned into behaving a certain way. It is only through the expansion of the tribe, the authority of the leaders, and the sealing of borders that this conditioning was contained.

Now we have large populations contained within countries with one national language, we are able to start seeing for the first time, the result of the many millennia of conditioning. Were the italians hot-headed on their chariots shouting and swearing at each other if someone pulled out in front of them on the via appia (*an ancient Roman road in Italy*)? Who knows! All I know is that the aggressive car driving, and the emotional outbursts stemmed from the conditioning of a small number of people a long time ago. After all, it takes a long time for something to become a tradition or “in the culture,” and there haven't been cars for that long! I may be wrong about all this, and I'm sure there are scientists lining up to correct me, but bear with me for a moment while we explore this in further detail.

Can emotional expression be cultural?

When we are in our own countries, we can, to a certain extent, predict how people are going to behave. We look at how they are dressed, what posture their body is in, whether they look aggressive or peaceful, and we make judgements about them which we believe to be relatively accurate (based on our own experience, memory, knowledge etc.), but something strange happens when we go to a different country, doesn't it?

All of a sudden, we are thrown into the lions den. We cannot judge peoples behaviour as we can at home; suddenly people can seem threatening, when in fact there is no threat, just fear of the unknown.

We don't know what to make of these strangers, and in fact our ancestors would have felt the same walking into new territories, and meeting new tribes who had a different language and different behaviour. So what we think is being loud or angry, may in fact just be the way the people have been conditioned to be many years back.

It is really quite a simple act. The mother and father speak loudly, the teachers speak loudly, and the leaders of the country speak loudly, so why would you do any different? You are not being brainwashed, you are merely copying what you hear around you in order to fit in.

A couple of years ago I had a girlfriend from the czech republic. I had never been to eastern europe before, and only knew of the country as one that had been ruled by the communists for many years, everyone lived in soviet style apartment blocks, and people drove smelly trabants. I was quite nervous when I went there as I really did feel as if I was stepping into uncharted waters; and it had nothing to do with the language.

From my experience with working with several eastern european workers in ireland months earlier, I had found them all to be aggressive, and quite angry, so I wasn't at all surprised that when we had a slight disagreement my girlfriend went off the rails shouting and screaming at me; and it wasn't over anything serious.

I was shaken. I had never heard anyone speak like that to anyone, and I have had some serious arguments with my parents, and my ex-girlfriends! This was something different; this was something alien to me. Put it this way, I wasn't used to being shouted at like that, or having to shout back loudly so I could be heard.

"I have never met anyone as angry as you," I shouted. "You should get some help!"

But then something strange happened one evening later that week. My girlfriend and her parents were having, what sounded like a terrible argument, and I was concerned.

"What was all that about?" I asked her later.

"Oh nothing."

"But it sounded like you were having a terrible argument!"

"What!" she laughed, "we were just discussing something on the news!"

"Oh..."

As time went on, and after spending many nights in the local pub (doing research you understand), I began to understand what was happening here. They weren't generally angry, but spoke more loudly than we british did in normal discussions, so that when they were really angry it sounded like they were going to kill someone! For someone who has been used to people behaving in a different way, it was quite scary.

Not knowing what people were like, what would upset them, what I could, and couldn't say, or whether I would offend their religion, or their government by saying something I thought to be harmless, put a terrible strain on my mind. Try as I might, I couldn't understand them. And of course I couldn't; they had been conditioned, as I had, over many centuries. It's just that the conditioners were different.

Needless to say, I found all this "culture" way too disturbing, and beat a hasty retreat back to the safety of my own conditioning. "Ahh, that's better," I thought, as I cruised through social interactions like a knife through butter.

But I learned something important when I was there. I learned that the conditioning of the individual and the group had gone so far that perhaps there was no way back. Perhaps the culture was imprinted on my brain from day one. One thing I did know was that there was no such thing as a "true individual." Sure, some thought a bit differently from others, or did different jobs, but holding it all together was the box clearly labelled "*PRODUCT OF CULTURE*."

The miracle of the neutral cultural territory

As you will know from our previous discussions, I lived in australia for a few years, and had an australian wife. We travelled around the world for most of the time we were together, and so we were always on neutral cultural territory. We were always living in someone else's culture, and we had to behave according to their rules and customs, so there was no me, the british, or her, the australian. We were both just individuals, and for a time we were both free of our cultural (if not individual) conditioning.

As time went on, we decided to return to her home country (as the weather was better than in my home country), and almost as soon as I arrived there, I could feel a change in her. I couldn't quite put my finger on it, but there was something clearly different about her. Something I hadn't noticed when we had been on neutral territory.

"You've changed since we came back to australia," I said to her one day.

"No I haven't," she said. "You've changed."

"I've changed?"

"Yes, you have; you have become a different person!" she retorted.

"All I know is, that when we were travelling you were different, now you're home you act different, speak different, like different things to me. I can't believe you've changed so much!"

"Well you're different when you're back in england too," she said, half crying. "When we stayed with your mum, you changed so much!"

"How?" I asked. "Why didn't you say something?"

"I don't know, I just figured that was the real you," she replied.

"But it isn't the real me. The real me is when I'm with you!" I pleaded.

But it was true. All of it. The real me was when I was on neutral cultural territory with her, and it was the same with her. People said that the reason we were having problems with our relationship was because now we had stopped travelling and come back to reality; but I knew this was something different, something you couldn't quite put your finger on. This was a clash of cultures!

Fast forward to the present day, and I am currently staying with in the north of sweden with my swedish girlfriend. We met on an island retreat off the west of scotland – a place where we were on neutral cultural territory. But once again, I noticed that when we came to sweden, she was different; she was on her home territory!

"Of course, I've changed," she said casually when I asked her if it was just me thinking too much. "I'm at home. I'm swedish!" She wasn't in any way arrogant about it, just very matter of fact. "Oh, and while we're on the subject," she added, "do you know that you're different when you're home in england with your friends and family!"

"Gosh. Am I?"

At that precise moment I knew the answer. I was different. We are all "different" when we are back at home, but the only person who can see that is an outsider who gets to spend enough time with you to see both sides.

The road back

We are so blinded by the conditioning, we don't even realise we are loud, or emotional, or quiet and reserved; it takes someone else to show it to us. The effect the collective culture has on us is so deep, so profound that only by seeing yourself through someone else's eyes (who is not conditioned by your culture) can you open the door to freedom. Freedom to think, not as a citizen of a country, but as a human being. Perhaps all this suggests that everyone should have a cross border relationship in order to see the depth of their cultural conditioning, or maybe what we're saying is: If you're going to have a cross border relationship, always live on neutral cultural territory!

But we all have to take a long deep look inside to find the authentic self. We have to unravel all the centuries of conditioning that has been piled on us. We have to look outside of our own family and our own culture, and go somewhere else, not so we can admire or criticize their culture, but so that in them, we can

see ourselves in reflection. We must learn to laugh at some of the silly things we do that are so ingrained in our culture.

I wish to give you one last story before we wrap this topic up, and it happened in a fast food restaurant in england recently. My girlfriend ordered a burger and fries from the counter, but then asked if she could have a knife and fork with it as well. I started to laugh and I could see the woman behind the counter was quietly giggling to herself.

“What?!” she asked indignantly.

“Sorry. It’s just really funny that you are asking for a knife and fork.”

“Why?” She asked.

“Well, because over here you’re supposed to eat your burger with your hands!”

“Well in sweden, we use a knife and fork! Who eats with their hands?” she said getting quite angry.

“We eat with our hands; When in rome...” I added thoughtlessly.

“Well we’re not in rome, and I want a knife and fork!”

Within a minute, we could both see the funny side and we both started to laugh at how ridiculous we had been, at trying to convince each other who was in the right! We realised that this was the culture at work. Right here in a fast food restaurant. Deeply ingrained, ready to fight anyone who challenged it.

So we agreed that there was nothing wrong with asking for a knife and fork to eat your burger with, but that she should look into how she became so conditioned to needing it, and I agreed to try eating a veggie burger with a knife and fork one day; and look into how I became so conditioned as to think one no longer ate meals with a knife and fork!

So you can see what we are up against.

We shout “Savour the differences of our cultures;” and for tourism purposes, that might work, but there is something sinister at work here; the work of mind conditioning on such a massive scale that it has a new name – “culture.”

Where is the individual? Where is the authentic man or woman? Have they been lost forever or should we just start by looking at ourselves when we are on neutral cultural territory.

Do all of us a favour, and next time you are on holiday, or on business, begin to notice things that annoy you about the country you are in, or things you miss from home, and you may find yourself laughing at some of the ridiculous things you do, think, and say, because of your culture. Then again you may not.

Behind it all, this is no laughing matter. It is all of our responsibilities to attain the unattainable, and free ourselves from individual and cultural conditioning. Where will you find it? You will find it very close to home, but it exists only in awareness of self. Good luck with your journey.

[Back to Index](#)

D

Death

1. *The event of dying or departure from life*
2. *The time at which life ends; continuing until dead*
3. *The time when something ends*

This is a subject that no one wants to discuss. It's something that occurs naturally, but as humans we are not prepared to accept it. We want to live forever. As intelligent beings we know that physically, it isn't possible for our bodies to live forever, because, like a machine, they eventually wear out. So we invent all sorts of magical ways in which we can live on eternally. I am not here to discuss whether there is such a thing as eternal life, that is for you to inform yourself on, what I want to talk to you about now is death...

Your death

What do you think death will feel like? Will the actual event hurt at all? Will you and I suffer, or will it be peaceful and calm? I cannot answer any of those questions, and nor can anyone else, as those who have died already can't tell us. But it is interesting that we even think about these things; that we concern ourselves with a one-off event that is inevitable. We don't want to suffer, we don't want to feel pain, but death is final. There is no pain. The brain stops working, the heart stops, the lungs stop; all activities relating to life are at an end, there are no more messages being relayed as to what pain is. You are at an end – physically and mentally.

Surely what we are concerning ourselves with are the moments leading up to our death; when the realisation hits us, that in a short time, we will no longer see, we will no longer taste, we will no longer feel; and for a human that is a scary thought. Our brains need to try to make sense of what death actually is, we need to know what happens to us in order to have no fear, and that's what it is, fear. The fear of the word death, not the actual event.

So now, I would like you to imagine a rather macabre scenario for a moment, if you will, which relates to your death. I would like you to imagine that you have just died, and your family are discussing the funeral arrangements. You left no instructions for the type of funeral you would like, and they are discussing whether to cremate you or bury you. Do you want to burn or decompose? I'll give you the options in a little more detail:

Option A: You are placed in a coffin, the lid is sealed shut, and you are placed into a furnace, the temperature reaches thousands of degrees... Can you imagine it now? How do you feel? Do you feel trapped, knowing you are burning? Your flesh burns first, then your muscles and all your organs, then finally your bones. It takes a short time and at the other end they sweep the remains of you (ash) into a nice urn, and someone may place you on a mantle piece, or you will be scattered all over a place you used to love.

Option B: You are placed in a coffin, the lid is sealed shut, and you are slowly lowered into the cold wet ground. Earth is thrown on top of your coffin, and there you lie, six feet underground. Can you notice how cold and claustrophobic you feel? After a while, the body starts the process of decomposition (*the process of decay caused by bacterial or fungal action*). Your flesh and your organs start to rot and soon you will nothing more than bones.

So which one's it going to be? Well for me, given the choice, neither. I don't want to be burned or buried! It would hurt. And this is the problem. We are still thinking of death as if we will experience it with all the senses and feelings we have now. That's why we are afraid of it. We believe we will still have consciousness after we die.

Fortunately for us, someone has conveniently come up with a way out of suffering at death, so that as soon as your body stops working you are whisked off to a much nicer place before you have to think of being buried or cremated. That place, if you didn't know it already, is the...

Afterlife

1. Life after death

Let's go into this carefully together. The afterlife. A word so paradoxical, don't you think? If death means the time at which life ends, doesn't it seem a little strange that there is another word that starts life again? Can there be death at the end of the afterlife, or is the afterlife eternal, and indeed if there was such a thing as eternal life, why couldn't we just live it out here?

I for one do not want to start a discussion, or indeed a war, about the existence of an afterlife. Scholars, philosophers, learned men, people of the christian church, muslims, buddhists, hindus, and members of every other religious group have occupied their valuable (short) time on this earth discussing this subject.

Every religion has their version of an afterlife, which is any place of complete bliss, delight and peace. Ahhh, bliss, delight, and peace, that's so much better. And indeed it is, because for most of us, the promise of this afterlife sounds much better than our lives on earth.

For me, I find it strange that we humans, of distinctly superior intelligence to any other species on the planet; we who demand evidence in everything we do today, quite happily accept some story of an imagined future life after our physical death.

"Prove to me that my investment of £10,000 will increase to £15,000 in 2 years"

"Prove to me that the washing machine you are selling to me is better than the cheaper one"

"Prove that alternative medicine is beneficial"

"Prove that I will save money on my telephone bill in 3 months"

We want proof for everything. We would not give over money to anybody, without proof that what they were offering was verifiable. So don't you find it strange that we just accept – without any physical evidence – that we will live forever (after we die of course)? Think about this for a moment. Do you believe in life after death? I would like you to think carefully about your response here and then remember the last thing that someone tried to sell you, but couldn't prove it would be beneficial.

Salesman: It will save you 20% on your electric bill.

You: If you can't prove it, I'm not interested.

Salesman: There is life after death.

You: Great. I look forward to it.

How can we be so demanding of evidence from the man who *can* probably save you twenty percent on your next electric bill, yet accept with blind belief the statement that there is life after death, which to me seems like much more of a major claim to make, don't you? Why? Because it's what we want to believe. We don't want to die, we want to live forever. It is built into the nature of Man, who since awakening to himself and his existence, has been afraid of death.

We have worshipped a thousand gods, from the sun to the moon, making sacrifices, praying that we will be saved from death. It is the one thing that every man and woman on this earth fears most deeply. So when someone comes along and tells you that you don't need to be afraid anymore (as long as you believe in god) as there is a convenient little thing called the "afterlife," we jump at it with open arms.

I wonder if animals, birds, and fish dream of this afterlife? After all, most of them die pretty nasty deaths at the hands of predators. I wonder if the mouse thinks "Oh, it'll be all right if the owl eats me tonight, because I won't suffer, I'm going to a better place – a place of complete bliss, delight, and peace"?

But as we all *know*, animals do not currently have the capacity to ponder such questions such as the nature of their own existence. So I would like you to imagine for a moment that you do not have the ability to contemplate the nature of your own existence and have never heard the word death and no one has told you of an afterlife. You are like the animals, fish, and the birds, only living for today, for now.

You work every day, have a family, enjoy yourself, and have fun in life, without thinking about an end. How would you feel? I know how I would feel. Free. Free of the chains of death, as death is no longer a

concept I can entertain. I live each day well, I live each day as it comes. I am like the bird flying in the sky, who beats its wings furiously until the last moment when his body fails him. I have no fear. I am alive and that is what is important to me, and I plan to use every moment well.

Life

1. *The experience of being alive; the course of human events and activities*

All too often, we use this imagined future of an afterlife as something which allows us to behave any way we want on earth. We behave in unkind ways to other humans and other inhabitants of the planet. We cheat, we steal, we are greedy, we lie, and we murder, but it's ok, because we promise we'll be better next time round.

If you knew you only had one chance at life, that this was it, that there was no afterlife, wouldn't you behave a little differently? Would you keep worrying that one day you would die? Would you worry about your age all the time and how close you were to death?

The other day I worked out, that if I live until the age of 80, I have approximately 15,695 days until I die; and I have lived for 13,505 days already. What did I do with those days? How did I spend them? Did I live well each day? Was I kind to other people I met? Occasionally. Did I hurt a lot of people along the way? Yes. Did I deceive, cheat, and lie? Yes. Did I value my friends and family enough? Was I kind to animals?

There are a million questions I could ask myself about how I lived in the past, how I spent my time on the planet; but I prefer to think about the next 15,695 days, and how I will spend each one of them.

Will I be cruel and unkind to my fellow humans? Will I be selfish in sharing my time with my family? Will I do work that adversely affects other people, animals, and the planet around me? Will I strive to possess more consumer goods, and more monetary wealth? Will I spend my time praying and hoping that the next life is better than this one?

Or will I do something different? Will I see death as part of a natural process of life? Will I embrace this concept and release myself from the prison of fear I keep myself in, thereby allowing me to concentrate on living well, and being kind to others around me; from my parents to the animals in the forest, to my children, and the fish in the depths of the ocean? That is life. There is no second chance. Life is one word. One word that must be taken as seriously as it also must be taken in fun.

How many days have you lived on the planet? What have you done with those days? How many days do you have left on the planet? A thousand? Five thousand? Ten thousand? Twenty five thousand?

Nobody knows exactly how many days each of us has left on the planet, so hadn't we better start living each day as if it were our last? It's time to start living, to stop caring about death, to break through the fear. There is nothing you can do to stop it. Embrace death and at the same time embrace life. Life is what you have now. Death is not a concept that need concern you. You can find bliss, delight, and peace while you are alive. Start today.

[Back to Index](#)

Desire

1. *The feeling that accompanies an unsatisfied state*
2. *An inclination to want things*

What is your heart's desire?

Tell me. What do you desire in life? What do you really want? Some of you may desire peace on earth, happiness, or untold riches and power, but whether you desire to save the world or destroy it, you both originate from the same source.

The dictionary definition tells us that desire is a feeling that accompanies an unsatisfied state; but why are you unsatisfied? Were you born that way? Is it in your genetic heritage? Or is it something that creeps up on you while you're not looking and possesses you?

First of all, we have to recognise that we are desire. It doesn't matter where it originates from. We are told by the churchmen that desire is a sin, and that god will punish those who desire, but that's all a bit too fire and brimstone for my liking. I want to get underneath the word and find out what it really means to desire something, why I desire it, and why I get angry when I can't have it. Let us begin our discussion slowly and carefully.

I have always desired things, women mostly; not for who they were, but what they looked like. I desired their full blooded lips, their breasts, their curved waists and their long legs and I wanted to have them now. Why shouldn't I? After all, I desired them, so that was half way there to getting them into bed with me. Occasionally I got lucky, and had passionate sex with one or more of them, but in the morning, the feeling of contentment had gone and I was once again unsatisfied. Perhaps, as my therapist once said, the reason I desired these women is that I was longing for love, but that couldn't be it. I desired money as much as I desired women, and money wasn't a replacement for love (was it?)

Maybe I just wanted to be happy, and that's why I was desiring all of these material pleasures; but I felt happy and content in life, I just desired women and money, that was all, surely it didn't make me a bad person? Maybe I was a sex maniac, suggested another therapist, and I desired women because I couldn't ever satisfy my craving. But I wasn't a sex maniac; I didn't want to have sex with women all the time, and anyway, I had plenty of girlfriends who would have been more than happy to satisfy any unfulfilled sexual desire. No, there had to be more to it than that.

I once told a friend I was "in lust" with her; I didn't really know what it meant but I had heard the word used often. That's it I thought, maybe this whole desire thing is just lust, and I started my journey to find out what it meant to be in lust, not just with a person, but with an object, or an idea.

Lust

1. *A strong sexual desire*
2. *Self-indulgent sexual desire (personified as one of the deadly sins)*
3. *Have a craving, appetite, or great desire for*

I lusted after one girl for quite a time. I loved her black hair, the shape of her mouth, her eyes, her large breasts, and her rounded bottom and long legs. She was "perfect" in my eyes. Her laugh was captivating, her conversation engaging. I was already in a relationship and I think she was too, and she was just a friend of a friend I happened to see occasionally in bars and cafe's. I already had a girlfriend who had lovely dark hair, a captivating laugh, had nice breasts and long legs, and I thought I was in love with her; so I found it a great surprise to see myself lusting around after this other girl, flirting and talking excitedly to her, without regard to my girlfriend.

Every time she would come into the bar, I felt a wave of excitement come over me, my heart would start to pound. I loved the way she looked, with her green eyes, enhanced by mascara and her lips reddened by lipstick, and as she would come over to talk to me, I inhaled her perfume so deeply I could feel it engulf me. I loved her straight away, I wanted her to be mine, I didn't want her to be with her boyfriend anymore, I hated him, and how he touched her when I was around. I faced up to it that I was jealous.

I wanted her more than words could hope to express, I wanted to spend every minute with her. I couldn't stop thinking about her at work, and it was starting to affect my relationship with my girlfriend. I became cold towards her, I didn't want to make love to her any more. The smell of her perfume that once enchanted

me, became sour. I had to be with this girl, I kept thinking, she is the one I love, not my girlfriend.

My lucky break came one Saturday evening during a party at the local bar, there were over 150 people there, and we were all crammed in together, laughing and drinking. I saw her out the corner of my eye and smiled at her. She came over:

“Hi alan! Howya doing?”

“Great thanks, you?”

“Oh ok...”

And at that moment, our eyes met and something electric went through my body. I instantly started to become nervous and I said in a somewhat less confident voice:

“Where’s your boyfriend tonight?”

“Oh, he’s away for the weekend...”

“Oh!” I said, feigning surprise, “do you want a drink?”

“Sure.”

So we stood and talked, and talked about life and love, and how our other half’s were annoying us so much, and we drank and we drank and we laughed and we laughed. Suddenly she said:

“Do you want to get out of here? It’s too busy.”

“Sure” I replied. “Where?”

“Well... We *could* go back to my place, there’s no one there and I’ve got plenty of booze!”

So off we walked, and as we walked she linked her arm in mine. My heart was nearly at mach two, it was beating so fast. We got to her place and I noticed that actually I was pretty drunk. She lit some candles and put on some music. She got me a strong gin and tonic, and we sat on the sofa together. I can frankly say that I have no idea what we were talking about, it was all a bit of a blur. But I do remember that she leaned over and suddenly kissed me. Her lips were swollen, and she tasted sweet, and we kissed for what seemed like several hours. She then got up, and went to take my hand.

“I want to make love to you” she said.

I whispered something like,

“I’ve wanted you for so long...”

And we went into the bedroom, where she undressed me gently, caressing every part of my body as she went. I slightly remember fumbling with her bra strap, but finally we were naked. Her body was on top of mine, her skin felt so soft and so smooth, and she smelled even sweeter than she tasted. Our bodies became entwined in heady passion. I felt that maybe I was dreaming, but as she caressed my body with her tongue, I knew it was real.

“Make love to me now” she said in a whisper. And as she said that, I rolled on top of her and gently slid inside her. I will save you the gory details, but needless to say it was the best love making of my life, without a doubt! and sometime after sunrise we fell asleep in each others arms.

Now, I have had a lot of one night stands in my life, but usually when I wake up in the morning in a strange bed, I start to worry, and think “I’ve got to get out of here,” (it’s funny how different the world looks when the alcohol wears off), but as I woke, I felt none of that. I felt a strange calm as I lay there next to her. She was facing me, and she still looked as beautiful as she had done the night before. Wow! I thought. This must be love.

We eventually got dressed, swapped phone numbers, and I went back to my own place in a bit of a dream state. I had a shower, put on some clean clothes and made myself something to eat without a single thought of my girlfriend. I was filled with this new girl. I couldn’t believe that, from a feeling of “I like you” I had finally made love to her just hours before. I heard the phone go; it was a text:

“Fancy something to eat and a chat later?”

I checked the number and it was her...

“Definitely! What time?” I replied.

“Pick me up at eight.”

Hours seemed to pass and I avoided my girlfriend’s calls to my mobile as I don’t think I would have been able to lie at that moment. Fortunately, she didn’t come round.

I picked up the new girl at eight and she looked beautiful, just as she had done from the moment I met her. We talked and laughed and then she said:

“You know I’ve got a boyfriend,”

“Well I’ve got a girlfriend you know.”

“So what are we going to do?” she asked.

I was in shock, here was the girl I loved asking me to be with her.

“Well it will be difficult but I want to be with you” I replied.

“Me too” she said.

And we both shared a sigh of relief.

“When will you tell her?” she asked.

“This week.”

“Ok, I’ll tell my boyfriend then as well.”

The next week was very stressful, and when I did eventually tell my girlfriend it felt like relief, even though she was shouting and crying. But then she was gone. She picked up her stuff the next day and that was it. I was now free, and so was the new love of my life.

We were now free to spend every waking moment with each other, and we did. We made love as often as we could; we went to the cinema, we went for walks by the river, we talked and we talked and we loved. But four weeks later. Nothing. Suddenly I didn’t like her perfume any more, I didn’t particularly like the way she dressed or how she spoke, and from what I could work out, she didn’t like me very much either. We just didn’t seem to have anything in common anymore. In fact looking back we never did. So that was it. We parted. As soon as love had come it had gone, and neither of us could work out why!

“Well, I guess that’s just the way it goes,” she said.

Suddenly I started thinking about my girlfriend again, and how mean I had been to her. “I must try to get back with her,” I thought. So I sent her flowers and gifts and sorry cards, but it was all too late. I had blown my chances with her. “Don’t ever contact me again,” came the text message late one night. And I never did.

So, that was that, I found out that lust is a short term affair. That it had nothing to do with real love; it was a chemical attraction between two people, and just like drugs, when the chemical wears off there is just a bleak reality staring you in the face.

But how could this have happened? I was so sure I was in love with her. I was so sure we would spend the rest of our lives together, and then it was over. I promised never to fall in lust again... Until the next time.

But lust is just desire, not companionship nor trust, and especially not love. I found that out! I wanted her and I had her. And that was the end of it. The same as she wanted me and had me. We had both desired to possess each other and once the possessing was done, there was nothing left. In the same way we desire consumer goods, power or money, but once the desire is satiated, we return to a state of dissatisfaction, and the whole process starts again.

Transcending desire

So what is it we really want? What is it we want in life that is not desire? And that is a hard question to answer. Desire is just want, remember. I want to make a lot of money, I want a new house, I want that girl, I want power, I want a diamond ring. Do you see? It makes no difference what the object of desire is made of – it doesn’t even have to be physical. But as soon as it takes root in your mind, all the connections will start to be made in your brain to help you get it. So it is dangerous to all.

But there is an easy way out. And that is, through understanding why you want something so much, you would do “anything” to get it. What, after all, is there in this life you could possibly want so much? You already have everything you need. You have food, shelter, and clothing (hopefully) and perhaps someone to share your life, but it isn’t enough, is it? You must have more, you deserve more; and if you want something, why shouldn’t you have it?

But into this life we are born, naked, and we will exit it much the same way. Whether we desired or possessed has no effect on the outcome. We will die. You will die. And what good came of the misery you created whilst desiring so much? As I found out to my detriment, I already had everything I needed, and when I desired more I ended up with nothing. That was an important lesson for me.

The second lesson was in understanding that trying to become something or somebody was also desire. My parents always wanted me to be somebody; they wanted me to do something with my life and become someone. From being somebody or becoming somebody I take it to mean they wanted me to be successful in

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

business, or be rich and have a large house. But it started early on in life at school. “What do you want to be when you grow up?” they would ask. If I knew then what I know now I would say “I just want to be,” that would have foxed them! But do you understand what I am saying here?

Our whole lives are geared up for desire, so it's no wonder we actively desire things when we get older. “Become something great,” my mum used to say, but now I know I do not need to become or be anything other than what I am. I am neither great nor stupid. I am neither rich nor poor. I just am.

Perhaps it is a hard concept for you to grasp; but when I ask you what you are, you always reply: “I am a student, I am an engineer, I am unemployed, I am poor, I am wealthy,” But those are just a man-made labels. The beginning part, “I am,” is all that you are. It is all that I am, do you see? You are neither a businessman nor a thief. You just are.

When we try to become something, we engage the desire module in the brain which says “Let's become something,” because our poor old brains don't know any better. If only they could see that the human being is already all that he can be. It is the brain that is saying “No, I do not have enough,” not you. You already know you have enough, but your brain just can't get it into its head!

When we become, we change what we are. When we just “be,” we are already! Does that make any sense to you? Once I start the process of becoming, we start an unstoppable chain of events. The brain doesn't know when it's time to stop becoming and just be satisfied, it thinks you want to keep changing all the time, and the only way to stop it is to say “Hold on brain, I'm sick of this becoming something else, I am happy the way I am. I am satisfied with life, I am satisfied with who I am, it is you who wants to make me something I am not. I cannot desire more than I am already. I just am,” and you will feel the calm wash over you.

So when the seed of desire tries to plant itself in your brain, watch it carefully and calmly laugh and let it pass over you. If we are still desiring the material, how can we ever expect to be free of the conflict we find ourselves in, day after day? No good ever comes out of wanting something so much that the desire becomes your reason for living.

You already have a good reason for living: To experience the wonder of the world and share in its magic; and to help create a world with compassion, free from division and hatred. But if you want that externally, then it is just desire. By becoming the creation and the compassion, you will find that the sands of desire just blow over you. Watch yourself closely, then watch yourself some more. You are everything. You just are.

I AM

[Back to Index](#)

Disarmament

1. *Act of reducing or depriving of arms*

Over the course of our other discussions we have talked about war and weapons. We have even talked about the manufacture of guns, and how life would be a lot nicer (and less bloody) if we just stopped making the stupid things! Sorry, but sometimes the human idiocy knows no bounds. So anyway, here we are, left with tens of millions of pistols, automatic rifles, rocket launchers, surface to air missiles, tanks, anti-personnel mines, grenades, cruise missiles, and last but not least, will you please give a warm welcome to everybody's favourite deterrent... The intercontinental nuclear missile! So there you have it. It's not a complete list by any means, and there are always new weapons being developed all the time, after all, it is a business you know, and people have to make a living to feed their families!

There is no corner of the globe untouched by guns and weapons. Some are in daily use, others are stockpiled "just in case." So let us begin our discussion. Let us attempt to find out why it is Man can't get rid of his arms (actually, if he got rid of his arms, he would find it difficult to fire a gun. There's an idea!)

I can't disarm. It's impossible

So I called up a couple of countries, and asked them why they couldn't just get rid of all the weapons that they, as countries, held. Obviously there will still be some illegal weapons, but we can't help that for now. This is a transcript of the conversations.

- Me:** Hello, is that the head of the armed forces?
Chief: Speaking. What can I do for you?
Me: Look, I know you've probably heard question this a million times from the 'anti-war lot.'
Chief: Yeah, them, they can be a right pain in the ass!
Me: Tell me about it. Always complaining about something. But look, I really want to ask you a serious question. Why can't you just disarm. I mean get rid of all of your weapons? It seems kind of stupid to me. I know we can't all get on all the time, but having all these things to kill people makes it worse don't you think?
Chief: Look, I'll be straight with you as you seem like a decent guy. We don't *need* weapons, we *need* them just in case anyone attacks us.
Me: But why? Surely if everyone has no weapons whose going to risk attacking with spears and swords. Actually forget I said that, I forgot what they used to wage war with.
Chief: Yeah, I wondered if you'd spot that! Look, even if you manage to get everyone in the world to give up their big weapons, they are just the modern day equivalent of swords and knives – they do the same job at a further distance. I'm sure if you had been in a medieval battle you would have realised that some of the weapons they used were far more gruesome than ones employed today, and remember that people will always have knives.
Me: I'm sure. But it doesn't answer my question, why don't you do as the anti-war protesters have been asking you to do, and disarm?
Chief: Look one day, some lunatic with a bomb, or even a sword, is going to come over here and attempt to conquer us. We can't allow that, we have a responsibility to the people.
Me: But what if the people didn't want these weapons?
Chief: Look, don't be so naive. If the people didn't want a country with an army or weapons they wouldn't have voted this government in. They would have voted some other party whose manifesto is to disband the army and get rid of all weapons.
Me: So it's the people's fault?
Chief: Ha ha. Sure is. Any other questions?
Me: No, no. I'm done. Thanks for your time.
Chief: (still laughing) It's been my pleasure.

So I hung up the phone trying to understand what had just been said to me, and it became clear that it was not the government's fault, or the army's fault. The people (in a democracy) vote for the government and parliament makes the laws. So all they had to do was pass a law to get rid of all the weapons, and we would

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

be free. But something was still troubling me. Something the chief had said to me earlier. So I decided to make another call, this time to a different country (democratic).

Me: Hello. Is that the chief of the armed forces?

Chief 2: Yes, it is. Who am I speaking to?

Me: Oh, you don't know me, my name's alan, and I'm calling you about disarmament.

Chief 2: (not sounding very happy) Disarmament? How did you get my number?

Me: That doesn't matter. Can you spare two minutes of your time for me?

Chief 2: I suppose so, but make it quick, I'm a busy man.

Me: I'm sure you are, so here's the thing. In order to further the human race, and all who inhabit this earth. I thought it would be a good idea if everyone just disarmed and destroyed all their weapons.

Chief 2: Ha! That's a joke; why would any army do that? They need their weapons. And anyway, anything can be made into a weapon, you don't have to buy machine guns. For thousands of years armies have been fighting each other, you don't think they had tanks and mines back then, do you? (lightening up a little) We are an army, our job is to fight and destroy the enemy, we don't need any 'special' weapons, we have our soldiers. So as long as there is an army, disarming all the modern weapons doesn't make any difference. My men can fight hand to hand if they have to.

Me: But what if we got rid of the army?

Chief 2: Why would you want to do a stupid thing like that after all the army has done for you and your anti-war friends! This conversation is ended.

So that was the end of that. It didn't matter if we got rid of all the weapons as I think he said they could still fight, "hand to hand," if they have to. Well, I agree with him that anything can be a weapon, but modern weapons can kill more people. And if the army can fight hand to hand, then they're going to go in and kill everyone anyway. So disarming is pointless. It makes no difference if we keep the weapons or not. I decided to make one last call, this time to a communist dictatorship.

Me: Hello, is that the chief of the armed forces?

Chief 3: Yes, to whom am I speaking?

Me: This is alan, from england, and I want to talk to you about disarmament. Do you have a couple of minutes to talk?

Chief 3: Well, ok. Seeing as you are on the phone. Go ahead.

Me: I have spoken to two different armed forces chiefs, but they were from democratic countries, so I thought I would get a view from a different angle, you know from a dictatorship?

Chief 3: Ah, I'm sure my democratic friends had some interesting viewpoint, no? But let me tell you, We are not so different from them.

Me: How so? I thought you brutally put down any kind of rebellion – that you killed people, or imprisoned them, because they do not agree with your views.

Chief 3: My friend, they are not my views. I am a mere soldier. I just follow orders. There are people in power who decide what is law. It is the same in your country, no? You cannot just stage an uprising against the government without any response from the Army can you? You cannot riot without it being put down. If you become a threat to their power, you too will have to go. They walk around in their expensive suits looking meek and mild, but because we wear our uniform you think we are more brutal. But at least we show who we really are. We make no pretences. We say: 'If you do not obey our laws we will have to deal with you.' It is the same in your country. The press just makes us look bad, so that your leaders look good!

Me: But at least in our country people get the vote!

Chief 3: And who do they vote for? The same people every time. The names of the parties may change occasionally, but the people do not. These are people in the power business. That's all. They won't let anyone get in their way. So they tell you you have control of who gets into power, but someone is always in power, over you, ready to use whatever it takes to put you down if you try to revolt. It is the same here. But didn't you want to talk about disarmament?

Me: No, thank you, I don't think it matters anymore, goodbye.

As I put the phone down it became clear. This had nothing to do with disarmament. It didn't matter if we got rid of all the weapons. As long as the army still existed, it would fight with what ever it had to hand if it needed to, and the army would fight, because that is what they were paid to do.

Not paid to protect the people, but to preserve those in power; those who control us. And would they agree to disarming? No, of course not, because all these new weapons just make it a lot easier to control us (oh, sorry, and save us from all our enemies, who are actually not our enemies, but theirs.)

You see, although the army may be good at hand to hand contact, there's a lot more of us than there is of them. So it wouldn't be a fair fight. Giving the army automatic weapons kind of evens things up a bit. Twenty of us against one of him. No contest. We win. One of him with a machine gun against twenty of us. No contest. He wins hands down. And order is restored!

There will never be a time when I can see the leaders of any country giving up all their weapons, because they are their power base. They need something that others haven't got, so they can stay in power. Whether it be swords or crossbows, machine guns or nuclear weapons, the only reason the weapons are there are to protect the powerful.

I realised in a flash what needed to be done. Those in power needed to go if we were ever to get rid of all these terribly destructive weapons. But not a revolution, that is just guns meeting guns. Some ex-communist countries had revolutions where those in power were removed by millions of people demonstrating. But what happened? The old people in power were replaced by new people in power. They still have armies to control the people, and plenty of weapons. And so the cycle continues. What had to happen was the removal of power which is in itself a weapon. How would we be able to achieve that?

Well, we certainly wouldn't be able to think our way out of this difficulty which is causing people to suffer all over the world. We would need to find out what it is that attracts Man to power, and in understanding it deeply, be able to dismantle it once and for all. But first, let us find out what it means to be powerful.

[Back to Index](#)

Driving

- 1. The act of controlling and steering the movement of a vehicle*

Driving's great isn't it? You walk out your front door and there it is – metallic blue, cd player, alloy wheels, sports exhaust; your pride and joy! Remote unlocking; get in, belt up, tunes on, a quick look at yourself in the mirror, and away you go. Yes sir, the car's a great invention. Personal transportation, from your home to anywhere you want to go: To the office, the supermarket, a visit to your mothers, no, changed your mind, off to the cinema. A trip to the country, a trip to the ocean, day or night, rain or sun, ice or snow, the car gets you there, safely and securely. I'd like to see public transport do that!

The car's cheaper, more flexible, and let's face it, a great deal more comfortable. You can stop for a break when you want. You can take the scenic route. You can change the music whenever you like – try that on the bus or the train. No one's squashed up beside you, no one you don't know, you're safe and secure, locks down, eyes face forward, only you to worry about. Oh, and the small matter of the other 2000 drivers you will have to interact with on your journey...

"Get out the way!"

"Are you blind?"

"Women drivers!"

"What a driver! Where did you buy your licence from mate?"

"Yeah and you, you idiot!"

"Come on, come on. Can't you tell I'm in a hurry!"

"I'm gonna be late, let's move it!"

"It's green it's green, go on!"

... and other unsavoury comments and displays which usually require the driver to pull angry faces, use hand signals not found in the highway code book, and use as many sexual swear words as can be used in the time it takes for an old lady to pull right in front of you. Welcome to driving, 2006 style.

But for now, let's go back to a more placid age, a time when courtesy and calmness ruled the roads. A time when huge lorries and vans didn't hurtle past you at the speed of sound, and seventeen year old boys didn't drag race their mums cars on the high street. A time when the maximum speed was a leisurely stroll, and the era of the sales rep hadn't arrived. This was a time when people still walked to the shops, even when they owned a car.

Think back if you can, even if you weren't alive, to a time when your parents or grandparents started driving. Visualise this scene for a moment if you will, your grandfather at the wheel, his leather driving gloves smartly on the gear stick, starting the engine ever so calmly, no six-speaker cd player ready to pump out the sounds... Signal, leave the house, a quiet drive, and he and your grandmother arrive at their destination all calm.

Hmmm something's wrong, isn't there?, it all went a little bit too smoothly for my liking. Let's change the scenario to something a bit more modern.

Grandfather gets into the car, leather driving gloves on – he's late already, shit! Starts the engine, turns on the music, signals, and leaves the house... Two minutes later he hits traffic. He cuts down a side road, it's no better, he does a u-turn, he's back where he started... Argh, it's so frustrating. He gets onto the main road.

"Come on, come on, Jesus, what the hell are you doing, get out the way," he flashes his lights, drops down a gear and passes, making sure he signals the driver at fault with his middle finger. "Idiot!"

"Calm down dear," says grandmother.

"What? it wasn't my fault, did you see the way he was driving?"

Now. On to the motorway, accelerate, accelerate... nearly as fast as the trucks, but then one of them cuts him off. He decelerates sharply!

"Jesus, people are so bloody inconsiderate!"

The guy behind him beeps his horn, grandfather gives him the finger, accelerates again, and he's on. He's sweating now, his heart rates up, and he dances around from lane to lane, desperately trying to make up lost time. He glances over and grandmother's flushed.

"What's wrong with you?"

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

“Well your driving is a little erratic, slow down.”

“Slow down!? I’m only doing 50, we’re late already, do you want us to get there today? Jesus you’re always complaining.” After all that, he misses the exit. “See what you made me do?” he says.

Five more miles and he finally comes off, 360 degrees and back on the other side. He finally makes his exit, but he wasn’t prepared for traffic lights, every 200 metres a red. And another red, and another red.

“Jesus, why do they always phase these traffic lights wrong? There’s never a green when I come through here.”

Stop Start, Stop Start, and finally he turns into his destination. Exhausted. Hot and flustered Grandfather turns to grandmother as he gets out of the car, and says,

“I don’t want to stay long, I want to miss the traffic on the way back.”

That’s more like it!

So what’s the difference between the two scenarios? Well, obviously, in the second one, grandfather is a lot more stressed. There is a lot more traffic on the roads, and common courtesy seems to have given way to anger and abuse, resulting in himself and his passenger being highly strung before they even reach their destination.

People often report that their partners “change” when they get behind the wheel. There is even a new offence of “road rage,” and some people have actually been killed or beaten senseless by other drivers as a result of perceived bad driving! What’s going on? Driving should be a pleasant affair. We start at A, drive safely and considerately for our passengers and all other motorists, and arrive at B. But something makes the point between A and B a stressful affair for all involved. Let’s go into this carefully together shall we, because there’s more to motoring than just bad driving and stress.

Since the advent of mass motoring, cars have become a necessity for most people. In fact, we can’t live without them, as proved by the traffic jams all over the planet. Driving is no longer pleasurable; we don’t just use our cars on weekend trips to the country, we use them every minute of the day.

Drive the kids to school
Drive to work
Drive to a meeting
Drive to the shops
Drive home
Drive to the restaurant
Drive to the airport
Drive to the bus station
Drive to the cinema
Drive to your girlfriends house
Drive to the coast
Drive to the country
Drive yourself MAD

Cars are an integral part of modern life. They are status symbols, as much as transportation devices. In the same way we buy bigger houses to reflect our career, so we buy cars. Who ever heard of a managing director driving around in a ten year old car?

We buy cars that look good; cars that reflect our personalities. You couldn’t imagine an outrageous rock star driving around in the same car your mother drives to do the shopping in, could you?

Young people who can’t afford sports cars, buy accessories like alloy wheels, rear spoilers and exhausts that wouldn’t look out of place on a formula one racing car! You hear their in-car entertainment systems before you see the car. It’s all about...

Image

1. A personal facade that one presents to the world

A car lets people know your status in the world. It defines your personality. It allows people to know who they're dealing with before they meet you. Whether you're rich, wannabe rich, or poor. Whether your boring or fun; extrovert, introvert or a family man. Whether you're a corporate man or an entrepreneur, going up the ranks, or never got started. Think about it.

If you're stuck in a traffic jam, you look around. You look at people, you look at their cars, you try to imagine what sort of life they have, what sort of job they do – it's natural.

We look at the man in the red ferrari, and wonder if he's a media executive, in the film business, or if he's famous. Generally, a director of a multinational company wouldn't be seen dead in one of those. He's looking for something that's understated, but reflects the fact that he's serious, and has made it in life – something altogether more regal. The mobile phone salesman is in a "sooped-up" shopping car. It's loud, its paint job is louder, and reflects the fact that he himself is "loud." The fast talker, ready to get you to sign up to that new two year contract in ten minutes flat. The scientist who is thinking about a scientific equation doesn't care what people think about him, he is too busy in his own mind to worry about what car he is driving, although others will be judging him without his knowledge!

So let's face it – cars are important! The environmentalists just don't understand!

I want you to ask yourself now what car you would drive and why? What's your job? Why is it important to have a specific style of car to reflect your image?

Young men like to have nice cars to impress the ladies. You can't imagine picking up an attractive woman in a battered old car, she wouldn't be impressed. But pick her up in a sports car; now you're talking! Cars are a reflection of your wallet size, your job, your credit rating, the house you live in. At least that's what you want them to reflect. Some people have the nice car to give the impression they are wealthy, but that's all it is, an impression.

What about the way you drive? What does that say about you? Are you a fast driver, a slow driver, a lane changer or a racing line specialist? First off the lights or last? For some drivers, especially young males, full of testosterone, driving a car is not about getting from A to B but as a means of showing off their masculinity to their peers, and of course, impressionable young females (the same as showing off your muscles in a gym). You want to impress.

You have no driving skills, but you want to prove you are as fast as the formula one world champion; that you can corner harder than the best rally drivers – even on a country road with two way traffic. The faster you drive, the more excited you are, the more your peers egg you on, the faster you go. The faster you go the bigger your ego.

In your imagination you are the formula one world champion – you've played the computer game, now here's the reality. Under your right foot, the ultimate display signal of masculinity. Raw power. The girls are impressed, your friends are impressed, you are the man! Until you hit a tree. Death is not as impressive. Yet young males still line up every day for the honour of driving faster and harder than any one else, no matter what the cost.

The ferrari driver, on the other hand, is not so concerned about driving fast. You see, he is driving one of the most powerful cars on the planet, but he's not interested in that. If he was going fast you wouldn't be able to look at him, and that's what he wants. He wants you to look at the style of his car and listen to the raw power; after all, he spent an awful lot of money on it, and to drive it fast would be a waste (especially as the top speed is nearly two and a half times the speed limit).

This is a car to drive slowly, like a big cat on the prowl for prey. You want them to admire you – look how well you've done, look at the money you must have – and you pretend not to notice everyone staring.

To be fair, some people don't care about cars, they're just a method for getting themselves from A to B, and two types of people fit into this category: (a) The man who is comfortable with himself and doesn't need a car to show off to the world. Happy with who he is and what he's got, and (b) the man who knows he will never be able to afford a nice car and is resigned to driving his old car.

So now we have covered the car drivers status (the relative position or standing of the driver in society, his job, his wealth) and his image (the personal façade that he presents to the world:(whether he's fun, serious, fashionable, available, loud, introvert), let's look at other factors influencing driving.

**

Most of us don't live close to where we work anymore; we have to find someone willing to pay for our skills, and for that, we normally have to commute some distance. Many towns don't have a reliable public transport network, and those that do, are usually overcrowded and expensive (it should be noted that most new suburban living schemes are designed wholly around the fact that people are car drivers). The other factor being that new companies are often building their offices in areas only easily accessed by car.

Having to commute normally only means one thing, getting up early, and coming home late. This can be annoying for a single person, but for a couple with children this can start to cause a lot of stress between them. This happens whether using public transport or your car.

"I never see you before you leave, and you get home just as the children are going to bed."

But let's concentrate on the car driver. It's midweek, he's tired – too late to bed last night – he has to commute over one hour each way to work every day and his tolerance levels are down. He's having a stressful week at work. His wife is putting pressure on him because he's never at home. He's annoyed that she doesn't appreciate everything he's doing to provide them with a nice home in the suburbs. He's worrying about being late, as there's a traffic jam and he's got a meeting in fifteen minutes. He phones ahead to say he may be late, all the time cursing the queues, and then in the midst of all this, someone dares to pull out in front of him...

"What do you think you're doing you bloody idiot, are you blind! Couldn't you see me coming, it's my right of way..."

His heart rate starts to rise, his blood pressure too. He feels more anxious, he starts worrying more about being late, he gets more frustrated, and the more frustrated he gets the more he starts to get angry about the stupidity of the driver who pulled out in front of him. So he starts his day off as he means to go on. Stressed.

His boss isn't happy about something, and his wife calls him to say she wants him home early. He's behind at work, but he leaves on time and sits again in the queue, desperately watching the clock, knowing what his wife will say if he's late. He can't be late, he'll have to find another route. He twists and turns through side streets, gaining only seconds, dodging people crossing the road.

"Get out of the way, can't you see I'm in a hurry?" He fiddles around, trying to find the phone, to say he may be late and fails to notice a car pulling out, he brakes sharply.

"Jesus, that was close!" "Idiot, idiot!" He bangs the steering wheel and flashes his lights, the other driver signals him with a rude finger sign, which infuriates him more. He beeps his horn, and if he could get hold of that driver he may just kill him! His heart rate is rising fast, he feels out of breath. He loosens his shirt, his palms are sweating slightly. He gets home, forty minutes late.

"Where have you been!" his wife screams. "Your dinner's cold, and the children are in bed already. You're so inconsiderate!"

So you have a shower, a glass of wine, and try to relax; you better get to bed early, you've got it all to do tomorrow, and the next day, and the next week, and the next month, and the next year. It's a never ending cycle of stress.

*Home stress becomes driving stress
Driving stress becomes work stress
Work stress becomes driving stress
Driving stress becomes home stress
Repeat*

It's no wonder people need a drink!

So on the whole, I would say that commuting is not good for the health of our system, our families' systems, and the systems of all the other commuters around you.

But...

The man who pulled out in front of you wasn't trying to make you angry or upset, and the people in the traffic jam weren't trying to make you late. They were all just in their own stress cycles.

The car is one result of the way society is changing in its organisation; where we live, where we work, the jobs we do. No longer do we work together as a family or community unit, we now work for global corporations or larger businesses often many miles from where we live; often travelling by car all over the country on company business. Without the car, the way we organise our working lives today would be very different.

Let's move on in our investigation, shall we? I want to talk about our grandparents. Few had cars when they were working, then again, the world was a very different place. There was no need to move around; people generally lived close to their place of work – public transport would suffice.

If they wanted to go anywhere at the weekend, they were happy to take the bus or the train. Cars hadn't been around long, and they were out of the price range of most people. Train suited the more leisurely pace of life.

Consumerism was a word in its infancy, so the need to earn vast sums of money was unnecessary. They didn't have as many possessions as we do today, but then again, their needs were much simpler. Shopping had not yet become a hobby, and they purchased their food from local stores: The butcher, the fishmonger and the greengrocer all sold local products.

Supermarkets hadn't even been thought of, so there was no need to transport vast quantities of food around the globe. Fast forward to the present day.

Life is complicated in comparison, although we buy things to make our lives easier. The car is one of those things. A great invention, designed to help, and ends up causing as many problems as it solves – yet, unlike the bicycle, has become strangely addictive.

We can't go anywhere without the car now. We make all sorts of excuses about how we would walk but "how would we get our shopping home?," or we would take the bus, "but have you ever tried to take the bus with three children?" or, "I like the train, it's just too expensive and inconvenient."

All valid excuses, but how did your grandparents cope? How did they get their shopping home, or take their three children out? Now I hear a lot of you saying, "there's no point in looking to the past, they had a much easier time back then, we have to embrace progress, and the car has improved our lives, no question about it." But when we talk about improving our lives, do we not mean make them easier in much the same way that "supermarkets have improved our lives?"

I often wonder what the expression *make life easier*, means, and I have come to think that perhaps it means we don't have to do as much physically, we don't have to put in as much effort. Dare I say it? The car has made us lazy.

Lazy

1. *Disinclined to work or exertion*

"But I work hard, I have a very busy life, I'm certainly not lazy."

What I would like to discuss with you is that we use our car for everything now.

Imagine if you didn't have a car. What would you do? It would be awful for the first month. Not being able to get fifty bags of shopping. Having to walk the children to school. Having to walk to public transport to catch your bus/train to work. Having to plan your days out around public transport – how inconvenient! Not being able to go places on a whim, getting wet if it's raining, getting cold feet and hands in the winter – how terrible; but I think we would soon get over it.

Not having a car starts to put us back in touch with reality. The reality of the society we are creating around us, one which is only possible due to the convenience of the car.

When you walk, you start to reconnect with the environment around you. You see people, you look at buildings, at trees, you notice things you hadn't noticed before. The air is fresh (or if you live in a city you start to notice the pollution that the car drivers are spewing out of their exhausts), you get more exercise, and if you're late, you get more exercise by walking faster (but this kind of rushing stress works its way out of the body through vigorous exercise).

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Man is not supposed to be enclosed in a bubble all day, we are an outdoor species.

You start to make different choices about employment, so you don't have to commute so far to work. You can think about things you need to deal with during your day. You can talk on the phone without fear of crashing. You start to notice more people on the streets. Not having a car fills the streets with people again. You learn that we have to live with everyone, we can't just shut ourselves away from the world by putting our locks down. You learn what it is to be a pedestrian and fight to cross the road, thereby angering some car driver who is in a rush. You will notice how stressed the car drivers are in the city.

You will feel calmer

In the first sentence I mentioned that the car was a great invention, and indeed it is. It allows us to make choices that were not possible by past generations, but it has also lead to us locking ourselves away from the rest of society.

Unlock the doors of the house, unlock the car, drive, locks down, back to the house, lock the car, lock ourselves in the house.

People always tell you what a dangerous place the world is, but the more we shut ourselves away from it, the more it becomes us against them, the constant fear that something bad will happen to you if you are out on the streets. But when the people get back onto the streets, the fear starts diminishing.

In some countries and cities, you never see anyone walking, you would be considered mad – just asking to be robbed – but if all the car drivers get out the car, and start walking, we reclaim the streets from gangs, and people intent on doing us harm. When people start cooperating together, they are a powerful force.

I still think there's a place in the world for the car when we manage to make it run on clean fuel, or solar, or battery cells, but the problem with the car is not really about it harming the environment (although that is a consideration), it's about us as a society; how we are using the car to change our lives. How we use it as a status symbol. How we are using it as a projection for our image, our personality. How we have become angrier and more stressed since acquiring it. How we have lost contact with other people. How we cocoon ourselves; and mostly, how afraid we have become of losing it.

Environmentalists will tell you to get out of your car because you're "harming the environment," but you don't want to hear that, it's your choice if you want to drive, and you're right, it is. But I would like you think outside of greenhouse gases, and petrol fumes.

Fear of loss is a powerful emotion and humans have a great ability to want to hang onto something once they've got it, whether it's good or bad. "It's mine, I worked for it and I'm going to keep it." I would like you to think what you would be gaining by stopping using the car so much. Stop for a moment and consider it.

I notice how my life changes when I have a car. I jump in to go 200 metres to the shops. I get angry when people pull out in front of me. I am stressed because of traffic. I worry I may get a parking ticket, or my car is towed away in the city. I worry about the cost of insurance and car tax. I worry about the cost of servicing the car. I have to remember to take everything out in case someone smashes the window to steal from me – fuel costs and the environment are the least of my worries!

I'd love to give you some tips on driving, tell you to calm down, to relax while you're driving, not to get angry at others mistakes, to think about car sharing so you're not the only person in the car, to think about adopting or starting schemes that rent cars on an hour by hour basis for the community, or even think about buying a car with four friends (but you'd only fight over it).

I'd love to tell you you don't need a car to show off to everyone, and that driving fast only leads to more stress. But then again, you are the most intelligent species on the planet, so you already know all this.

The car's not to blame, it's just four wheels, a piece of metal, and a few wires.

It's how you think about it that matters.

[Back to Index](#)

Drugs

1. *A substance that is used as a medicine or narcotic*

Yeah, let's get high!

Have you tried drugs? The ones that are illegal, like cocaine, heroine, acid, speed, ecstasy, or marijuana? Are you one of the millions of people around the world who have sat getting high or danced the night away in a nightclub? Or maybe you've just passed out in a doorway somewhere?

I've tried drugs, and whatever anyone tries to tell you, drugs are good! Of course they are, that's why they're illegal, they're too good. Forget what your parents tell you. Forget what the government and your teachers tell you; if drugs were so bad, why do you think people would continue taking them? People aren't stupid! They belong to the most intelligent species on the planet, and if they say they're good, there is no reason to believe they are not telling the truth.

There is evidence that Man has been taking stimulants of some kind or other for many thousands of years. Perhaps the drugs had some positive benefit during our long evolution; perhaps they staved off cold or helped us to work in harsh conditions. Whatever the case, drugs are now here for one thing: Pleasure.

Do you remember the old pleasure centres in the brain we talked about in the topics addiction and alcohol? I won't go into this in detail again, but let's all just accept why we take drugs. It's because they make us feel good and we get great *pleasure* from taking them.

Drugs are no different to alcohol, they were just commercialised a lot later than beer and wine. I'm sure that if beer was to be invented now it would surely be banned; it certainly causes far more social problems than drugs ever have, but we digress. Let's get back to the task of getting high...

It's cool to smoke a joint with your friends, isn't it? Passing it round, inhaling the sweet smoke, feeling spacey and chilled, or dropping a couple of pills before going clubbing; getting that loved-up feeling as you sweatily dance around feeling sexy.

Let's face it, most people who take drugs don't have a long term dependence or addiction to them, in fact it's usually something that is done in your youth at college or university, and gradually fades as one grows up and has more responsibility.

There are, of course, long term abusers, who are addicted to the strongest drugs (because they're the best), who cause social problems, and steal to fund their habit, but these people are the exception. They are the drug equivalents of long term alcohol abusers. So let's not blow all this out of proportion by saying that drugs are the worst thing in the world (I'm sure some of you anti-drug campaigners are getting quite hot under the collar reading this!).

We waste millions of pounds each year with our "war on drugs" campaigns, trying to crack down on the production and supply of something people want! That's right, they actually want these drugs, so let's not demonise the pushers. This is pure capitalism; supply and demand; someone wants it, so someone supplies it. If no one actually wanted drugs do you think these big drug cartels would still be in business? The only reason that there is a large amount of violence associated with the trade is due it being illegal, it attracts the more criminally minded types to it, but apart from that, it's just a business.

Ask anyone who takes drugs, why they do it, and they'll tell you "because it feels good." Most people who take drugs aren't addicts, they're just like all your other friends. They could be lawyers, doctors, or senior managers, it doesn't matter what job they do, they take drugs because they like them. I have had many friends who took drugs regularly (every weekend), and you wouldn't class them as addicts, these were good citizens who paid their taxes on time, and went to work every day. They just saw it as a bit of fun. They never thought what they were doing was in anyway bad, immoral, or illegal, they were just exercising their right as human beings to get high!

Of course, the come down from drugs is much stronger than that of alcohol, but that's the cost you have to be prepared to pay if you want to get high.

All in all, taking drugs is no different to getting drunk. You may have more intense experiences with some drugs, you may see things that aren't there (acid); you may experience a rapid pulse, sweating, and jaw clenching (ecstasy); you may feel as if you just can't stop talking (speed); or you may feel ultra confident (cocaine); or you may feel as if you are glued to the spot, unable to move, and maybe a little bit paranoid (marijuana). Hey, but this is all part and parcel of getting high. You want the pleasure, you pay the cost.

So there you have it. If you want to feel good take drugs, they are much longer lasting, and also a much cheaper night out than alcohol. The end.

Of course, if you've never wanted to take drugs. or you have known someone who has become addicted to

heroin or crack then you may feel like taking me to task over my last comments; telling me how you've seen what drugs can do to people, and what a terrible curse they are on society, but as I said, people choose to take them to feel extra good; to feel more pleasure than they can in normal life. Just because the after-effects are unpleasant (not only to the drug taker, but also the family members around them), and the person who has taken them may regret having done so, it doesn't mean they didn't enjoy themselves in the middle of the high! It's easy to apologise and feel sorry for yourself the next day. Do you follow?

I have no sympathy with anyone who takes drugs, they are doing it for their own pleasure, nothing else. If – by over consumption – they become addicted, I have sympathy for the rest of us having to listen to them complaining they are addicted, and how they are trying to get onto a program or get into rehab.

Once addicted, the drug takes over the mind, and tells lies to ensure it gets its supply. It cheats, it hurts, it destroys relationships, all so the brain can feel one more taste of pleasure. I have no sympathy for the users of drugs; why have sympathy when someone is doing something they love doing?

You'll notice when someone (a friend, partner, parent, or child) has started to become addicted to drugs; just like alcohol, you will notice a change. They may change their patterns of behaviour, they may lose their job through repeated non-attendance, they may get sick more often, or stay in bed longer than usual, they may become apathetic, depressed, or depending on what drug they are using, increasingly paranoid, hyperactive, or aggressive. They may start spending much more money than usual; money may start going missing from the house, and they may become demanding and use emotional blackmail to get what they want – money. Remember, it takes a lot of money to be a drug addict.

If you start to notice any changes which you feel uncomfortable about, it pays to deal with them as quickly as possible. You will find it hard to confront someone who is addicted. They may become defensive and lie blatantly to your face that they are not taking anything. Don't stop there. Talk to your local doctor, look online, try to arm yourself with facts. Confrontation is only likely to make you more upset.

Addiction is a terrible thing only because the people it harms most are the people who love the addicted person. They can't bear to see someone going through such pain, and they would do anything to stop it. The addict then exploits this to get what he or she wants; a fresh supply of their chosen pleasure pill.

Don't give in, no matter how much you love someone. Don't let it carry on for any period of time, once addicted that person is now in a prison, under the guard of their substance, ready to fight off anyone who interferes with their supply. Get them help immediately to get off the drug, it is available, but if you leave it too long they will drag you down with them.

While they are under the spell, they are lost to you; the person you used to know is no longer there. You are now dealing with a drug, and it's sneaky and cunning. Only once they are free will you be have your loved one back. Don't listen to their lies. That is the drug talking to get more of its supply...

Wow! When you listen to all that advice about drug addiction it makes you wonder why you even tried it, no?

I tried drugs only a handful of times, although I have tried cocaine, marijuana, ecstasy, and speed. It wasn't so much an experimentation as a "I was drunk anyway and someone offered it to me" experience. I never really liked drugs and was wary of them from the outset. Although the feeling was often good at the time, the come down (or hangover) from the drugs was often a cost more than I was prepared to pay. I felt panicky and anxious, and regretted my stupidity at having said yes to them, but that's peer pressure for you.

No one wants to be the one who says no, and gets laughed at; we all want to be cool, part of the in-crowd, don't we? So we take them anyway, no matter what the cost; we worry about that the next day. For now, it's time to have *fun*, and for most of us, taking drugs is all about having fun.

It's a laugh, isn't it? Being off your head on drugs, in a different world, experiencing things that other people can't. It's no wonder your parents can't understand you taking them, if all they do is drink alcohol; alcohol's tame isn't it? This is an instant buzz! You can't expand your consciousness with a glass of chardonnay can you? You can't see into a different world with a pint of beer can you?

But you're not expanding your consciousness, and you're not transcending dimensions, all that's happening is that the drug is acting on the brain and the body in ways which don't occur naturally; putting your system under tremendous pressure, raising your heart rate, amongst other things. The drugs are poisoning your system, but still you feel great. You're on top of the world. You are invincible, you can take on the world; everyone is in love with you, you are a god, you are all-powerful. Until the next day. And you are nothing.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

When the drug wears off, it's just plain old you again, feeling slightly worse than you did the day before you took the drug. It's just you with the same old problems, the same old job, the same bills. Life is suddenly boring without the drug, isn't it? So in order to feel slightly less bored with life, you take it again, then take it again.

Suddenly, you can't live life without it, and, wow! You're addicted. Not because the drug itself is addictive (which it is), but because you become addicted to the emotions you experience when taking the drug. Real life – natural life – isn't good enough for you any more, you need more; you need to feel different to everyone else. So go on, take the drug, escape reality, because that is what you are doing, and pretty soon, you won't want to come out of that world any more. It will become your reality. Albeit a false reality.

So tell me, oh great homo sapiens, what's wrong with reality, the world we all inhabit? Why is it so boring that you have to escape it? Why do you need to experiment? Tell me, were all those millions of years ultimately worth it? Now there are millions of us, snorting, injecting, smoking, swallowing substances that help us forget about life, that help us forget that billions of people have died to help us exist. That nature has been providing for millions of years to help us eat and drink, and our mothers have gone through pain and suffering to give birth to us. All for what? So we can "have a laugh," get drunk, get high, and stagger around saying "Wow! This is cool. Man I'm so wasted." Congratulations, life just passed you by.

And what a life it is. Full of wonder, beauty and surprises. Full of enjoyment of nature and each other. Such an abundant place, this earth.

Imagine for a moment, lying in nature, looking at the hills, smelling the fresh, clean air, watching the clouds roll past, imagining different faces in each one, free of tension, smiling; and now cross quickly to the seedy club.

You're drunk, you've just dropped a pill, your face is starting to become contorted, you start chewing or grinding your teeth, your heart rate is up, your starting to sweat, you can feel the rush going through your body! You feel like a million dollars, you're dancing hard, you're in love with everyone, the music is pounding...

But now cross quickly again to the hills, and imagine you have just been transported back to nature, and you meet your other self, the calm, relaxed self, smiling and enjoying life without any artificial enhancement; just pure relaxation. Imagine what your other self would say to you, while you stood there chewing your teeth, sweating, pupils dilated, disorientated. What would your other self think of you, seeing you on drugs there in the hills? Would he think you were cool, or would he just feel sorry for you; sorry you couldn't enjoy life as it is, that you couldn't learn to love reality, which is in nature all around us?

Learning to accept who we are, and accept reality is one of the greatest challenges we face as humans. We may look different from the animals and the birds, but we are a part of this great earth, just like them, and we are supposedly the most intelligent species on the planet. But every time we put a drug into our system, we detach ourselves from reality more. The drug allows us to retreat to a fantasy world, which exists only in our imagination.

Make a choice whether you want to discover reality, or whether you want to stay locked up in a drug prison. I know which one I choose, but maybe you are really dissatisfied with your life, maybe it's too boring; maybe it's not exciting enough for you; maybe reality's not cool enough for you; maybe you're too afraid of what your friends would say if you didn't join in, or maybe it's just you, you who wants to deny yourselves a chance at living a wonderful life with a clear mind.

Think for a moment, of all the people who are being killed in wars at this very moment. People who are being beaten and tortured. People who are starving. People with nothing – no running water, no electricity, maybe not even a place to sleep. Now think of you, sitting there with your friends, talking about drugs and how cool they are, waiting for the weekend to enjoy yourself, and maybe you will see what a waste of a life it is.

On the one hand, there are people trying desperately to cling on to life with their last breath, and on the other, there's you, throwing life away. If you are so intent on escaping from life, maybe you would be prepared to swap with someone who really wants to *live*.

[Back to Index](#)

E

Education

1. *The activities of educating or instructing; activities that impart knowledge or skill*
2. *Knowledge acquired by learning and instruction*
3. *The gradual process of acquiring knowledge*

Education. It's on everyone's lips – the politician's and the parent's. Education is vital. Education. Education. Education. You must learn more; you must study harder; you must pass your exams. But what I want to know is, what if there was no education? What if no one was taught anything? Would we still be the most intelligent species on the planet? Would we still reign supreme? Who would we be? I know that's a lot of questions to ask, but I think this is an important topic, don't you?

Let us start our discussion by asking a simple question of ourselves. If I had received no education, what would I think about, and would I even know how to think? We are born into this world with a blank canvas for a mind. We make gurgling noises; we cry when we are hungry; we scream when we are upset. But we cannot speak, we cannot walk, and we need constant looking after almost until we reach adulthood. Let's face it, we are a pretty helpless lot when we are young.

I said the mind is a blank canvas when we are born, and I'm sure some of you out there are disagreeing with me already; but let me ask you another question: What does the human mind contain when the child is born? Does it possess the power of intelligent thought, of rationalisation, of creation, of decision?

No, of course it doesn't. It can barely do anything on its own. What the child has, is *potential*, and that is the key here. We are a species with potential (*existing in possibility*). We do not have skills included in some kind of mind "blueprint."

Just because our ancestors discovered fire all those years ago, and Man went to the moon, doesn't mean that every child born has knowledge of how to do those things. They wouldn't even know how to boil a pan of water! So you see, before we get on our high horses thinking how great we are, remember that if no one educated you, and you could not observe (thereby learning how to do something) you would not have the inherent ability to do it.

Let us look at a baby bird for a moment. When the bird is born it too has limited abilities, and is reliant on its mother for food. It cannot fly, and if it were to fall out of the nest would surely die, but the mother doesn't have to teach the bird to fly by giving it verbal or written instructions. When the baby is old and strong enough it will make its first attempts at flight, and will succeed. Its body is perfectly designed for flight; it does not need to read books on how to do it – just as it doesn't need to read up on what to eat.

Like all animals with limited "intelligence," it operates to a blueprint manual. It does not have the mental capacity to decide "Actually, I'm not going to fly today. I'm going to walk," that would be absurd, as would it deciding to eat lettuce leaves instead of worms because he didn't fancy worms today, he fancied something a little more healthy! I joke with you here, but if you think about it, it is important to realise that Man is the only species born with built in potential.

A bird will always fly. A cow will always graze, but Man, Man can be, and do, and eat, almost anything he wants; that potential is what sets him apart from the animals. Mind you, the brain operates essential body functions on much the same blueprint as all other animals. That is what some people would refer to as our "old brain" before our higher brain "developed."

I can see that some of you are already disagreeing with what I am saying, especially if you believe Man was created – by an entity called god – in his present form, but please bear with me as we explore this together.

Even if Man was created by god and was born with the higher intelligence built in, we must all agree that Man's brain needs filling (if you'll excuse the word), before it can be used effectively at the high level of which it is capable. It makes no difference who the original creator is or was. The lower brain can, and does, operate at a reasonable level; dealing with breathing, hunger, fear, and generally controlling the body to keep all the systems in balance, but it is the higher brain we want to discuss here, the one that deals with "I."

The way I see it, when a child is born, the brain is pretty similar to my laptop when it leaves the factory! It has all the connections ready to do some complex calculations, but without the operating system is useless. It seems to me, that for humans language fulfils this function, and until we learn language, have no way of interpreting the world in a more complex way. Without the power of language what would a thought be? Listen to your mind for a moment, and tell me what you're thinking. Whose voice is that? What is it using? Language. Thinking requires language.

The next step is the software to run all the complex programming, and that is where education comes in. It's no good having the computer hardware and the operating system without any applications! We could

view these applications like reading, painting, or maths, but we can also have applications like, compassion, understanding, hate, desire, greed.

In my opinion, nothing apart from the basic survival activities, are built in; the rest are bolt-on applications, just like the word processor is on my laptop. All can be learned through education, and all can be unlearned through education too. I hope you can follow my train of thought here.

Some may say, that this is nonsense, that Man is born with an innate (*not established by conditioning or learning*) sense of right and wrong, and with morals, but the way I see it, right and wrong, and morals are man-made concepts, and depend on your particular cultural or religious viewpoint. All of which are learned behaviours.

Although we are talking about education here, do not get confused into thinking that education is only formal when it is done through a formal verbal, or written process. We are being educated (or conditioned) throughout our lives by observing, by listening, and by talking to others. A child quickly “learns” that it can get what it wants by modifying its behaviour. It has not had any formal education, but has nonetheless gone through a learning process, however simple it might be.

The beginning of learning

In the not too distant past, the only people who received any kind of higher education were wealthy people. There was no state schooling for all – which is still the case in some countries – and although the poor may have been able to get some basic skills, would not have reached their true potential (a sentence that was often used to describe my academic success, or lack of it!). So those with little or no education were resigned to doing tedious or dangerous manual jobs, which could be learned simply by repetition. These were jobs that required them only for their bodies; their minds were surplus to requirements. They were not expected to think, just do. Cut, saw, beat, lift, grind, etc.

But this is still going on isn't it? There are still people all over the world who do the same repetitive jobs day in day out, where the skill they have in their job, could, let's face it, be learned by almost anybody. Don't just think factory work, think office staff, think agricultural workers, retail staff, salesmen, supervisors, managers, all doing a job with a skill that is learned through repetition.

Please stop, and consider your own job for a moment. Could anybody learn it, or do you have a special skill that no one else has? Is your job repetitive? Did you go to university, only to end up doing a job, where even if the job is interesting, relies on memory?

We are all in the same boat. We go to school to get educated, and most of us end up spending our lives just repeating what we have learned, like monkeys (sorry monkeys, no hard feelings), all for a few pounds to pay the bills, buy some shelter and food, and a little left over for “fun.” Not much of a life, is it! So why on earth do we bother learning anything?

The purpose of education?

We all are all told to go to school to get a basic education in life. You know, like chemistry, maths, english, geography, or a foreign language. We are forced to study from around the age of five (although some parents put their children into pre-school to give them a head start) until sixteen or eighteen in most countries, at which time you can leave it you want. Most people stay on the extra couple of years to get more qualifications, and some people go to on to university to study one specific topic in greater detail.

In most countries, it is illegal to avoid going to school, and in some places parents can be punished in the form of monetary fines or prison if they fail to comply.

Children are shouted at, bribed, punished, and encouraged to stick in at school with constant reminders, that if they don't stick in, they won't get anywhere in life. So they learn and they learn. They try to remember the topics off by heart and then they take their exams. You've passed or you've failed. A pass means that people will look more favourably on you when it comes to getting a job, and a fail means go to the bottom, start again.

So, on the results of these exams, your working life begins. You are either a high achiever destined for

great things, or a low to middle achiever destined for mundaneness and boredom throughout your working life. Some end up in manual jobs, others end up pushing paper in an office; you see, not everyone can be the boss! If they could be, who would do all the work? So the education system filters people effectively, and channels them into jobs that need to be done, based on ability.

Some people aren't good at exams (perhaps they didn't like school or they had problems at home), but that doesn't matter to the education system; passing exams show you are capable of "achievement," that you are reaching your "potential;" that you will soon be able to contribute to society, and by contribute, I mean start to earn money.

Some of you will earn a lot of money and will have high positions in society, but most of you will just do a job that requires your labour and not a lot of use of 12 plus years of education.

I wonder if you ever remember how good you were at geography in school as you sit at your computer processing purchase orders? Probably not. School and education suddenly seem a lifetime ago when you are working nine or ten hours a day, travelling to work in a packed city, just so you can have a nice (or not) house, car, food, the odd social night out, and one holiday a year. Millions of years of evolution, and then repetition. Day in, day out.

A quick run-down on my scholastic life

My father told me that school was a preparation for adult life, and by all accounts I started preparing for adult life all too late! I was always seen as a failure in my father's eyes. I was average at primary school; my report cards always said I should "apply myself more," and "pay more attention" to my lessons – generally do better! I always got low grades, although I thought I did pay attention, and did study.

My teachers said I was a bright boy, but the work I put in was substandard, and that if I didn't stick in, I wouldn't reach my "potential." At 12 years old, I took the 12+ examination, and duly failed it. All my friends couldn't believe it, they thought I would sail through. I couldn't believe that some of the people I thought were less intelligent than me, passed!

So here was I at 12 years old, on the education scrapheap, about to go to a comprehensive (*a large british secondary school for children of all abilities*). My father wasn't having that as it would probably look bad for him if his son didn't go to a grammar school, so I was sent off to do the entrance examination for a private school. I got in and was sent off on the bus to this orthodox all boys school, where obedience was the order of the day.

Now, I've always been a light hearted sort of fellow, who thinks if there was more humour in the world there would be less hatred, but my teachers didn't see it that way.

I was never a bad student, but I did like to "have a laugh" in class, which was probably detrimental to my (and others) school work. I don't have a clear recollection of that school, but I think I enjoyed it. I liked running, and canoeing, and latin, english and french, but for the rest of the subjects, I really didn't have the time for them, and as such, was beaten by the teachers regularly.

Corporal punishment (*the infliction of physical injury on someone convicted of committing a crime*), as it was known, was still in full swing in our school, and I was hit on the head with books, and rulers, spent time dodging board erasers, and getting the cane (*a large stick, used to hit your posterior several times*). All this in addition to detention, and work squads, where you were forced to stay after school, and pick up litter etc.

As I said before, I was never a "bad" student. I never had (nor ever have had) any fights with any other pupils, and I was always polite, but they just didn't like my humour, it undermined their authority; and the need for absolute control and order was how the school ran. There was no tolerance for back chat. If you refused an order you went to the headmaster's office, or were given a physical punishment, or detention.

I completed my exams at 16 (just scraping through), but needless to say, I dropped out in the last year at 17. I can't really remember what the trigger was, but I'd pretty much had enough of that school and travelling 18 miles a day to a different town where I had no friends. So I left. Oh, I forgot, my parents did split up when I was about 14 which caused huge upset, but given that I was always "bad" at my school work – according to the teachers – I shouldn't really apportion the blame to that.

Soon after I left school, my mum found me a job. I started off as an accounts assistant, followed quickly by a telesales operator, followed quickly by a year planner salesman, followed by a recruitment assistant,

followed by another recruitment assistant, followed swiftly by a corporate hospitality salesman. I think I was fired from most of those, and they all lasted approximately one to two months. But after messing around, and making a general nuisance of myself for about two years, my dad asked me if I'd like to go to college to restudy for my a-levels, because, without them, he said, I'd never get a good job. So I did.

It was great, I got to live in a flat with some other students for a year, went out partying and drinking all the time, and duly failed my exams at the end of term. I was sent back to study for another term to retake them again, but I just went out and partied, and didn't turn up for the exam. Education over. I won't bore you with details of my other jobs, but I did end up working in a high paid job as a project manager, until I decided to give it all up in search of true education...

Self-education about self

We are taught daily for all of our pre-adult years. We learn everything about how to behave in public, what food to eat, respect for your elders, how to manage your money, or how to make babies; and then you hit eighteen and it all stops. In most countries, from then on, you are supposed to be an "adult." So what is an adult anyway?

In biology, I think it is a creature that is mature enough to reproduce, and that in the human world would be a lot earlier than eighteen. Take four or five years off, and that would be more like it.

Imagine children of thirteen or fourteen having to go out to work in the western world – most of them wouldn't know where to start! I do know that in some countries less financially well off than Britain that young children are forced to start working early, to help provide food for the family. One could even say they are getting an "education" just by working.

Some children, who come from homes where the parents are abusive, violent, or criminals, get a "street education," where they learn to stand up for themselves, be tough, and to get by in the world where no one else is looking out for them. But that's not what we want to talk about here, all the above educations are bolt-ons.

These are the applications which run on the computer, and are not the computer itself. What I would like you to do for a moment is sit back for a moment and imagine your core. The core of you, whatever it is, wherever it is, and try to imagine what it looks like, and what it feels like. I know this may seem strange, but it's of the utmost importance that you try it with me now.

You may think the core is the magical "soul," but that is just a man-made concept. The core is something like a nucleus, where underneath all the bolt-on conditioning and education, something resembling the real computer lies. Something which may seem out of reach right now, but which you will be able to access once you know how.

So who is this "core" I speak of, is it the "I," the "me" who makes all the decisions in life? To which I would answer that the "I" is the operating system. The core is a little like my laptop, which has all the connections in place ready to do work if the operating system and applications are compatible with it, and function correctly.

The problem with the operating system and the applications is that, although they are compatible with the computer, the results they give may be flawed. This could be the result of bad, sloppy programming, or the deliberate infection of the software by a virus. This you could compare to a parent who unwittingly programs a child to think a certain way, or to hate a certain race of people, or a government or religion which brainwashes the population into believing its propaganda or dogma.

Machine Code

1. A set of instructions coded so that the computer can use it directly without further translation

In our analogy with the computer, we can see that machine code is a way of communicating with the system directly, without the need for an operating system or applications. This binary set of instructions are alien to

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

most of us, but it is what the central processing unit really understands. 10001, 1011001, 1001, 100010, 1110011, Ones and zeros, that's it! Direct instruction. Direct communication. No bolt-ons necessary. This is what I am talking about when I talk about communication with the core.

This may all seem a bit far fetched to you, and I can hear some of you grumbling "What's he rambling on about now?" But if you pay close enough attention, you will begin to see what I mean.

Language, ideas, and formal education get in the way of knowledge. Sure you need to know how to fix a carburettor if you are a mechanic, but that is a job, here we are trying to get to know ourselves. The real us.

I am not so naive as to think that a few words from me here will get you started on a process of self-learning. Some of you may not even want to read any further because you are happy to just stay the same. But I'm sure most of you know deep down that there is more to know than just how to fix a carburettor, how to do complex equations, or manage a large corporation. It's time to strip away the bolt-ons and expose your core. How? Through the development of awareness.

Start to notice other humans, notice how they dress, how they walk, how they look – happy or sad. Notice what car they drive, the music coming from the window. Now start to notice man-made objects. The concrete buildings, the rows and rows of houses, the litter, the factories. Look at the drunk people falling around the street at night, the arguments and the fights, and now look at yourself. Your job, your nice house, your nice possessions. How do you feel about everything you are, everything you have? Your garden, or lack of it. Your desires, your loves, and your hates. Your prejudices and your opinions.

Just look at everything we have bolted on to the core. The core that is nature. Everything that surrounds us in our daily life is man-made, made possible through education. For what? Money? Happiness?

Everything you are, and everything you have learned, you need to forget. All of that is past. You are now right here. Open yourself up to learning about your true nature, without your job title, your religion, or your bank balance getting in the way. Everything man-made is an obstacle to understanding. Only when you can psychologically toss all of them aside will you be able to speak to the core. Remember that language is also man-made.

So how do you do it? Do I have the answer? Is there some magical trick I can write the instructions for you here? No, unfortunately not. Only by being aware of yourself without judgement, without interaction with the brain, can you start to see more clearly. You do not need any text books to do this, but you do need to give it your fullest attention. Do not distract yourself with music, idle chatter, or thoughts.

Be silent. Communicate.

I have just started on my journey to the core, and it can be scary at first. You find out all sorts of things about yourself you don't want to know as you start to peel off the layers. With each layer comes some unpleasant feelings, but stay with it. The rewards of getting closer are truly wonderful.

As I throw off the shackles to modern society and modern education, I find myself communing more with nature, and it amazes me what a transformation has gone through my whole system! I, who used to know nothing, and not want to learn anything, still know nothing, but I want to learn! I want to know it all. I want to know the secret of life. I want to know the secret of the universe. But I don't want to look in a textbook or go on a course. They can no more tell me what I want to know than an astronomer could. They see what is visible. They see what is past. They talk with their own voices, but with the knowledge of someone else. That is what a teacher does.

Teacher I am ready...

Teachers pass on someone else's knowledge, someone else's discovery, and pass it off as truth. But as we both know, truth is something that can only be discovered, not told. And whilst it makes no sense to drive yourself crazy, like I did, questioning everyone and everything every day, you must be aware that there is always another layer to peel off.

When newton first made his discoveries in physics, no one thought they could be bettered, they were accepted as truth; until a young man called einstein appeared 200 years later and turned science on its head!

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

I am sure it will happen again, maybe it will be you who discovers something amazing, maybe it will be in a thousand years. But remember that no education is absolute. There is no absolute truth. So although one and one is two according to ninety nine percent of us, there may be someone who comes along one day and proves to us that it isn't. That is why we must never stop discovering, never stop questioning, and never stop learning.

Once you decide to embark on your journey, you must be sure that the reason you want knowledge is to understand yourself and nature, which is the planet around you and the other species we share it with. Just learning so you can get a job, is what the governments of the world want us to do. You see, it is vital for them to make sure children go to school, otherwise the economy of the country would suffer, and if the economy suffers, it means people haven't got as much money as they once had, and if the people are not quiet and happy with their lot, they might just consider starting a revolution, and no government wants that!

You may think I am cynical, and that all the government wants is for a good future for the children. They also know they need educated people to run the country, develop new weapons, and generally keep the whole social status quo going. Basic education, as it is now, provides that. It is only when we start realising we are our own teachers, that things will change. When we stop conforming to what other people tell us we should learn, and start discovering for ourselves, will we start to truly understand.

The social elite fill children's heads with knowledge about historical dates and battles, conditioning them with their traditions and culture, leaving no space for self-discovery. It is a futile waste of such a magnificent brain. Such a brain, with what we called, "potential." Those in power believe that potential means they will get a good job and contribute to society. I mean they have the power to discover the universe within themselves.

All schools do is condition children to conform. Each new school which starts up promises to be different, but becomes the same as all the rest, as they are all trying to push their ideals onto the children. "This is the way you should think," "no, this is the way you should think."

There is a tug of war going on for who will control the child's mind. What will this child's mind be filled with? They would argue that without this education the child would not be able to function in society, but maybe it is high time we took away precisely this education to see what really is in a child's mind, and then help the child to discover himself and the world around him.

You may say that this is precisely the role of the modern day education system, but if that was the case, we would not place such demands on the child to perform at all costs. Each light illuminated in the world has its own journey to undertake; that is what we should be helping with, not trying to extinguish it before it even gets a chance to truly glow.

Who are we adults, after all? What right do we have to say what someone else should learn unless we have got more than just their interests at heart. We must not let the most advanced computer we currently know about, be crushed under the weight of adult idealism, greed, and power. We must free ourselves from those who dictate what we learn, and embark on our own journey, on a voyage of unlimited discovery.

I have embarked on mine. When will you begin yours?

[Back to Index](#)

Electricity

1. *A physical phenomenon associated with stationary or moving electrons and protons*
2. *Energy made available by the flow of electric charge through a conductor*

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

The invisible power behind our happiness

What a wonderful creation. What a marvellous invention. The things that have been made possible through its almost worldwide availability, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. We live in a world run by electricity – without it, our daily lives would change immeasurably. Before you say “Yes, but that’s not going to happen,” let’s step back in time for a moment shall we? Back to a time when electricity was not even a word, and let’s consider the humans that lived on the earth. Who were these people? What were their lives like? What did they eat? What did they do for work or for fun?

Stop for a minute, and allow yourself to imagine their lives. Were they easy or hard? And actually, while we’re sitting around pondering these questions, do you know how long ago I am talking about? A thousand years? Ten thousand years?

Well, the first power station opened in 1881, that is only 126 years ago; and reliable supply to all homes and businesses (in the developed world) has only really happened after the second world war, which only finished 62 years ago.

So in light of the fact that the earth we and all the other creatures inhabit has been around for several billion years, I think it’s fair to say that electricity is pretty new!

Yet we’re addicted to it already. Completely addicted. We couldn’t live without it now. It is who we are. It is who we aspire to be. It is what we want in life. It’s our happiness. It has overtaken our life. We are controlled by it. Our very existence in the modern world depends on it...

Let me explain.

This topic is not about the environment; it’s not about cutting back on the use of resources; it’s not about saving the planet from global warming; it’s about finding out who you and I are when the lights go out and the power stations come to a standstill. It’s about discovery; it’s about unlocking our conditioned minds to uncover our natural mind. This is a vital topic, and we need to go into it carefully, so if you’re ready, let’s start this journey together right now.

I sit in a library now as I write this. I am writing on my laptop. The room has a nice desk, two chairs, some wood panelling, and a wooden door with glass and a metal handle. The room is warm and, although small and basic, is comfortable. There is a power socket for my laptop. Next to me is my mobile phone, a pen, and some scrap paper. My winter jacket hangs over the chair and my rucksack is on the floor. I have a bottle of sparkling water I bought from a shop. The library itself is well lit and, although small, has an ample supply of books. I arrived here by car. This morning, I had a warm shower, made some porridge, and had a cup of tea, whilst checking my emails.

I want to stop right there for a moment. What did you notice in that list above? Anything? Seems like a normal list of my “stuff” and my surroundings, but let’s break it down shall we?

My laptop was made in a factory somewhere. The factory used electricity to make the components that go into my laptop. It is plugged into a socket that magically keeps the laptop on. The desk, chairs, and wood panelling in the library are made by a company somewhere using power tools that require electricity to cut the wood, which were themselves made using electricity. The door with its metal handle, and glass were all cut and made by some company somewhere using electricity. The lighting is generated by the power station, but the light bulbs, and the light fittings, and the cables were all made by some company somewhere using electricity to make them. My mobile phone was made using electricity. The scrap paper was cut in a factory using electricity. The pen was made using electricity. My winter jacket and my bottle of water were both made using electricity. The books in the library were printed using electricity, and the paper cut using electricity. My car does not run on electricity it runs on petrol, but we won’t get into the topic of oil here. The house I am living in has an electric power shower which is nice. My cup of tea was made using water boiled in a kettle that needed electricity to make the kettle, and electricity to boil the water. The tea bag was processed in a factory somewhere using electricity. The soy milk I put in it was made in a factory somewhere using electricity, as were my porridge oats, which were also heated in a pan on a stove using electricity.

Phew... That was a long list, and we’ve just got started!

So as you can see, I haven’t done much today, and look at the amount of electricity that already has had to be generated on my behalf. I don’t do work that uses lots of resources in the world, but already I seem to have burnt a lot of coal, and I have only come from home to the library! You see, our whole life as we know it depends on electricity to run it.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

I am sure most of you reading this own at least one electrical appliance you could not do without. Look around you. Now imagine that the power stations have all just run out of resources. What starts to happen? First, all your portable gadgets; mp3 players, laptops, and mobile phones start running out of battery. Suddenly you can't be "cool" walking down the street with your music player pounding your eardrums, suddenly you can't be "cool" chatting to friends on your mobile you just left or are going to see in five minutes. There's no one to text, and there's no downloadable ringtones to impress everybody with. Finding wi-fi hotspots is a waste of time – they've stopped working, and you haven't got anything to connect to them anyway, as computers require electricity to make! Shall we continue?

Your favourite coffee shop can't make any coffee any more, so you can't sit and read the paper there, and anyway there's no paper, as it requires electricity to make. The company you work for can't make anything anymore unless it's without electricity, and even if you don't make anything how are you going to get in touch with your clients? So you go to the supermarket to buy some food but all the packaging requires electricity to make, and so does all the processed food. You come home to find that your house is in darkness. It is quiet. You go to cook some food, but there is no way to cook it. Your frozen food starts melting, and soon the food in the fridge starts to go off, as it needs to be kept cool. Watching television isn't an option.

You sit down, pondering life for a moment. Why has this happened to you? You who has worked their way up in life. Look at all you have achieved. Look at the promotions you have been given. You have bought a nice house, you have a nice car you think people look at. You talk on your mobile phone incessantly planning something or other. You have a nice family, they go to a good school, and your partner doesn't want for anything.

Maybe you haven't done so well in life, but these are the things you aspire to aren't they? Everyone want a nice car, holidays in some faraway place, going out to restaurants, or buying the latest consumer goods. Now, no matter how hard you work you can never have them. What do you think about that?

Your status in the world depends on electricity!

So where does that leave you? Look around you again, wherever you are reading this, and tell me anything you can see that didn't require some kind of electricity to be made? Is there anything? One thing? It's unlikely. With the passing of the electrical age goes any form of mass production, food that requires storage or processing, gadgets to impress our friends with, cheap clothes, housing as we know it, or lighting. Need I list more?

In fact, I might be so bold as to say that without electricity, life for you and me in the fast lane, is now very much at a standstill. There's no one to phone to arrange going out for a drink, as the breweries haven't been able to produce any beer because they need power to run their bottling plants. Same goes for wine and spirits. Oh, you can't call them anyway, there's no phones.

Sure, you still have your possessions, but no one's making you any new ones. All your possessions that run on electricity are of no use to you now. You have to find amusement somewhere else. How do you feel right now? You've lost everything you have, although physically, it's still there! No one's impressed with you now. However you got the possessions, whether you worked honestly for them, or stole them, it doesn't matter. They're no good to you now and neither is your status in the world which was built on them. You are alone.

Your world must be getting quieter right now. The cities have gone quiet. Fast food is no more, the underground train is no more. Maybe crime has gone up, with some people not realising that stealing a tv is a worthless activity, even to barter for something else. After all, what good is a tv if there's nothing to watch? What you probably should be thinking about is food though, because without electricity, and refrigeration in particular, you're going to start getting pretty hungry pretty quickly. You better be thinking about that right now.

Where does your food come from? You all want to eat the finest food, but where does it actually come from? Even if you manage to get some food from a local farm there won't be enough to feed a city. Where will you get it from? All this food that is transported world-wide needs to be refrigerated, otherwise it will go off quickly, and that's just the fruit and vegetables. You can forget mass production and storage of meat.

Without refrigeration and freezers it will go bad very quickly; the same with fish - mass trawled and frozen at sea.

Without electricity, your food is going to have to come from a local farm in its raw state. Will there even be enough for everyone? Let's hope the water and sewage system doesn't require electricity either. Still, the environmentalists will be pleased, as you won't be producing as much rubbish (just in case you forgot, there's not much to produce without electricity).

I'm sorry to keep going on about the same thing, and reiterating the same word, but can't you see that we have built our whole world on shaky foundations? Even this book I am writing (which I think is so important you all read), could not now be finished. The laptop I am writing it on would not turn on, the cd I have backed it up on would not play; and how would I get it printed, how would you all get to read it? Without electricity, we're screwed! Sorry does that sound harsh? Well, I believe we all need a wake up call, you and I included, and the time to wake up is *now*.

Who are you?

So as you sit in the dark feeling sorry for yourselves, what are you going to do? What will you do for work, how will you provide for yourself and your family if you have one? What will you do for pleasure? Will there be any time for pleasure? What are you doing here? What is the meaning of life?

For all of us (except those who still don't have access to electricity, or the things it provides), we would be standing in a new world; an alien world, quite unlike anything any of us have ever seen, except maybe in the movies. This world would be very different to the one we inhabit now although it will be the same place, the same soil, the same ocean, and the same animals. The only thing that would start to be different, would be the people. That's you and me! Homo sapiens, the most intelligent beings on the planet.

So here we are. You and me. We speak different languages, we have different religions, we have different jobs, different opinions, we like different foods, we like to do different things for fun, but now when the electricity stops, how different are we? Well, we are still different; we still believe in different religions, have different political views; I am still violent, you are still peaceful, we still cannot understand each other because we speak a different language, and we still like different sports. But underneath all that, we have the same skin. Our body mechanics work in exactly the same way, our minds still feel fear, and our bodies still feel pain.

Electricity may be making our life easier, and giving us more free time, and saving our bodies from hard toil all day, but like the rest of the creatures on the planet we certainly don't need it, although we have come to depend on it. But the human is a highly adaptable creature, without this adaptability it is doubtful that the species could have progressed as much as it has. We don't need electricity. We have our minds, and we have our hands, and as we discussed earlier, up to recently not everyone had electricity in their homes. Up to the early 1800's there was no such thing as a light bulb!

Whilst we are on the subject of electricity we must not fail to mention two other sources of power, oil and gas, which were both used before electricity became widely available. Can you imagine doing without oil or gas? No gas stoves, no gas central heating, no petroleum driven cars. The combination of oil, gas, and electricity make us who we are today, but it does not make us who we are at the core. If there was no electricity tomorrow, we'd all be in shock, a lot of us may die, unable to cope without the benefits that electricity, oil, or gas provides (e.g. mass food production, and distribution, and warmth), but we'd bounce back; we'd adapt. That's what makes the human special.

Let me tell you about my experience with electricity. I was the guy who drove around in his powerful 4x4 jeep, talking on his mobile, listening to music with the window down so everyone could see how cool I was. I was the guy who worked in information technology, earned good money, and wasted it on electronic gadgets, beer, and having a good time. I had a small speedboat, went skiing regularly, took plenty of holidays, went out for meals all the time, and went to the cinema regularly. I always had the latest mobile phone, music player, or laptop (even after I had given up most other things).

Now, take away the means to have that good time (oil, gas, or electricity), and who was I? I truthfully have no idea! My whole being was based around these items without even realising it. Is yours? On

reflection, to some extent I still am addicted to oil, gas, and electricity because I live in a western country that is addicted to them; so maybe I should go and live in the woods on my own and be self-sufficient, which means using no tools or instruments that were made with the aid of oil, gas, or electricity, to make shelter, grow crops, make clothes, heat water, cook food, and make a plate, knife and fork to eat with! Maybe we all should, and see what it's like.

Until we go without power, how will we know who we really are? It's all very well for me to sit here in my nice, warm, well lit library, talking to you about this, but when I finish writing today I will go back to a nice, warm, well lit, comfortable house where I will cook my food on an electric stove, sleep in a bed made with the use of electricity, and wash in a shower heated by electricity. How can I talk to you about something I haven't experienced? I have tried to wrestle with this in my mind before writing this topic, but I believe we can explore these concepts in our minds.

So, now, try to imagine someone you know for a moment. It could be a friend, family member, or a colleague, someone who has a "powerful" or "important" position, or someone who has just "done well" for themselves. Or you can think about someone who is popular with everyone, or someone else who is clever, or someone everyone envies because he or she has a lot of money and an attractive partner. Have you got someone in mind?

When you are clear about who it is in your mind we can start our investigation. What we are going to try to do here is deconstruct them! By that I mean peel away all the layers that are attributable to external forces such as oil, gas, or electricity (power from coal/nuclear), as these are things I like to call bolt-ons, in that they are bolted on to the core of the human, but they are not integral nor essential. You can do this in your mind or you can write it down on paper.

Deconstructing my father

To help you with your deconstruction, I would like to take you on a personal journey with me and introduce you to my father. He is 74 now and is retired, although he still works as hard as he ever did. He was born in Glasgow just before the second world war, and although I don't know much about his early life, I know he came from a poor working class family. He had a reasonable education, although I know he didn't go to university. I don't know about his early jobs, but I know that when he started work as a clerk for a large aerospace firm he started studying accounting and was determined to get up the ladder in the organisation.

Over the years he was promoted several times, and eventually left to seek his fortune in England. He quickly climbed the ladder through finance and finally through to managing director, where he stayed in one firm, successfully expanding it until he retired some fifteen years ago. Since then, he has worked for charitable organisations tirelessly.

So there you have it. A brief history of my father's life.

Fairly unremarkable but nonetheless, he came from nothing, and ended with quite a lot. From a poor background he created wealth, and eventually managed to buy himself a nice house. He used to drive a large BMW he believed gave him status. More recently, he has been studying art history – amongst other things – and loves going to the opera and the theatre. He considers himself well read and loves jazz and classical music. He also enjoys eating out.

Does he attribute any of his success to electrical power being available to him 24 hours a day? Of course not! But the fact is that without it, all of his "success" would be gone...

Let's start with his early career working as a clerk for the aerospace firm. Without power there would be no aero engines being made, let alone getting planes off the ground. The same goes for all the manufacturing companies he ran. He was a finance man, a strategist, but there's no need for strategy if there's no power to make anything is there? Without power he would be doing things by hand, not sitting in a posh office on the tenth floor. He wouldn't have had time to read art history, there would be no BMW for him to drive, because they couldn't make it without power. He wouldn't be eating out because the restaurants need power to cook, power for lighting, and power to play ambient background music (which incidentally would have needed power to make the CD, record the music onto it, and distribute it to the shops).

In short, my dad needed power to be who he was, and is. His whole being depended on electricity, and still does. I don't know who he really is without the electricity. He has always tended to be quite arrogant

about what he had done in his life, and what he knew, and how much money he had earned, but if there was no electricity there to “fuel” his ego who would he truly be?

Like most of us in the developed world, my father doesn't know the “core” of himself. He is a man who has bolted on success, art, status, knowledge, money, etc. to himself as a direct result of electricity, oil, and gas being available.

It's strange to think that not only does he not know himself, but no one else does either. Not his wife, his son, his ex-wife, his brother, his friends, or his colleagues. Nobody knows my father! I have only once or twice gained some insight into him when his guard has been down, and all I have seen is an angry, yet rather nervous human being (he may positively disagree with me here).

In fact, this man whom I have been describing could be anyone. He could be me. He could be you. He is just an ordinary human being who was born, grew up, followed what he thought he was supposed to do (work hard), was interested in sport and the arts, made a “contribution” to society via his charitable works, and will die one day. All without knowing that electricity gave him confidence. It gave him pleasure; it gave him power and status in business; it gave him ambition; it gave him comfort and security; it gave him life!

For the second deconstruction, it's time to tackle someone a little closer to home, that's right! You! This is not an exercise, more an observation of yourself in action in the world to see how electricity, oil, and gas have moulded who you are and what you think about. You don't need to do it now, just start to pay attention to yourself as you go through your daily life as you casually pick up your mobile, or run yourself a hot bath, or read your emails, or shop at the supermarket.

Electricity, oil, and gas. Three things that have changed not only the world we live in, but how we view ourselves in the world. With all the bolt-ons that electricity can provide, we have created a whole new existence for ourselves. Indeed we are superficially happier. We feel more comfortable in the world surrounded by all our gadgets. We feel safer in our houses because they are well lit. We like the warmth that heating provides or the cooling that air conditioning provides if we live in a warm country. We like the convenience foods that mass production and distribution enables (thanks to electricity). We like everything that is shiny and new.

Oh no! What will happen if it all runs out one day?

“Don't worry,” says you, “the scientists will have come up with a new way to generate power so we can still build things, buy things, and generally amuse ourselves.”

But when we come down to it, we don't need electricity, oil, or gas to survive, do we? Of course not! It's just nice to have. It makes us feel less like the animals we deny we are, and separate from anything in the natural world. It keeps fear at bay. Fear of the dark, fear of strange creatures roaming around.

Having all this “power” makes us feel invincible. It gives us strength, makes us feel important, makes us feel what we are doing in the world is worthwhile. But the animals don't have it, do they? Nor do the birds, or the fish, and they seem to get on all right!

We need to face the fact that we are all afraid of life, and electricity helps us feel less afraid. We surround our core with the comfort that electricity provides, but in order to break free of fear we must start letting things go. I'm sure that's a scary thought for most of you, and I can hear some of you saying “Why should I let go of something I like?” But this is not about not having electric lights in your home, it's about realising the psychological dependence on it. It's about finding out who you are without it.

Go Camping!

Yes, one good way to start is to go camping! I know this sounds silly, but it's the closest thing most modern city or urban dwellers will get to removing electricity from their lives. Not the camping I have seen in countries like Australia, where they bring everything but the kitchen sink with them. What I am talking about is going out camping with just your tent (which incidentally would have required electricity to make it) and some basic equipment and food (or better still, you could fast for the evening). Don't take a torch, music players, sat-nav, maps, or anything that will distract you. Don't have your car or 4x4 with you, use public

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

transport to get there, and walk the rest of the way. This can just be for one night, it's up to you.

When you are in your camping spot, pay close attention to the sounds and the smells around you. Listen to the animals at night, listen to the trees, and look up at the stars if it is a clear night. One thing you will notice is that you are ready for bed a lot earlier than normal.

Now it's time to look at yourself. How do you feel in this place? How do you feel here alone? Who are you? I mean really? Now you have no bolt-ons it is just you, homo sapiens; the most resourceful, successful species on earth. What do you miss? Are you scared without your four walls? Can you cope with the silence that is nature in the evening – if you pay close attention you will notice that nature is not silent at all.

What do you look forward to when you return home? Why do you look forward to it? What are you dependent on? Could you live out here without electricity? Why not? When you return to your city try to compare how you felt out in the wilderness with how you are feeling at home. What do you miss about being back? Anything? Nothing?

As I sit and write this last section, I look up at the electric light above my head, the clothes I am wearing, the wooden panelling in the writing room, the door, and I realise I am nothing without electricity. I, the modern human, am dependent on it, and I really have no idea who I'd be without it.

It rules my life, as it rules yours; and until I can break free completely (which means living in a place where there is no electricity and no products are made using electricity or other source of power), I may never truly know, and that is a sad thought.

Many of us meditate, and follow ancient religions in the hope we will uncover who we really are; but we meditate in warm rooms, and listen to sermons in warm rooms, and live in comfortable surroundings. It is of the utmost importance that we find out who we are without electricity. It is only then we will truly start to know ourselves.

Who are we without electricity?
Begin the search

[Back to Index](#)

Embarrassment

1. *The shame you feel when your inadequacy or guilt is made public*
2. *Feeling or caused to feel uneasy and self-conscious (embarrassed)*
3. *Made to feel uncomfortable because of shame or wounded pride*

What is it that makes some of us feel embarrassed about certain things? I didn't think I was easily embarrassed until I started to think about this topic several months ago. But it was so clear to me once I understood, that I let go of all embarrassment; and through that letting go, I felt free! Let me tell you how it happened.

I was working for a college that helped children with special needs, and just after arriving to pick them up and take them home one afternoon, I realised I needed to go to the toilet; just a wee (*[Brit, vulgar] Informal term for urination*), you understand. I went into the toilet block and saw that it was full, with one person waiting. Seconds later, a couple of other people came in. I couldn't use the private cubicles because they were occupied too, so I waited my turn.

Secretly I was hoping it would be the end stall that became free, but to my horror, the boy who finished first was in the middle urinal. I was just about to say to the person standing behind me, "You can go first," when I realised how stupid I would look to them.

I went up to the urinal, unzipped my trousers, and stood there with my penis in my hand. I knew it would happen, and although I tried not to think about it, try as I might, I couldn't go – not with other people standing either side of me. What should I do? I had to think quickly! I'm sure the other people were thinking as they happily relieved themselves: "What's wrong with him? Why can't he go?"

They weren't looking over, but I knew what they were thinking, after all they would know that there was no sound of splashing coming from my urinal. Maybe I could just zip up again and say "can't go," but that would be stupid. Maybe I should just zip up and wait for the private cubicle, but I desperately needed to go now. "Why does this happen to me every time?" I thought, whilst trying to give an outward appearance of calm. First the boy on my left was replaced by one of the queuers, then the boy on my right. "How stupid must I look?" I thought. They must be laughing at me now.

"Ha ha, a member of staff was in the toilet, and he couldn't go because he's embarrassed," they would tell other boys. "He's still in there now!" and they would all have a laugh about it.

Seconds passed although it seemed like hours, when I suddenly realised "Why am I embarrassed? What is it about standing going to the toilet, when other people are clearly not interested in you, which makes you freeze, and not able to go?"

"It's me!" I replied in my head. "I get in the way. I am the one who is stopping myself from relieving myself. My own thoughts are stopping me from going to the toilet. I am in the way."

"So get out of the way, so we can go to the toilet," I replied.

"I will." I answered.

And at that moment I started to urinate! And boy, did it feel good.

Mirror mirror on the wall

Sorry about that silly story for all you who hate toilet stories, but it is a true story, and it was true that I did get the flash of insight, that I was the one stopping myself from going to the toilet. From that day on I have never had another problem at the urinal (you will be glad to hear).

But in all seriousness, embarrassment is not a natural phenomenon, it is brought about by the "me" coming into play, which is caused by thought. We *all* worry what other people will think of us. Take for example getting changed to go swimming.

I have never felt I had a great body, I always had skinny legs from running, and a little bit of a fat belly from drinking beer, so every time I got undressed in front of people who obviously had more muscle than me, I felt embarrassed. Lying on the beach was fine, but when I stood up to run into the water, I was always self-conscious of the extra fat I had around (what should have been) my pectoral muscles!

I never once thought that all I had to do was go to the gym and do some chest press exercises to get rid of them – no, I was more content on feeling embarrassed at the beach. If I had never seen men with large muscles striding up and down in their minuscule speedos I would probably never have given it a second thought, but I saw those ripped torsos, and although I didn't feel envious of them, I felt extremely low about my own physique. You see, I just didn't match up. How were the women on the beach going to like me if I didn't look like that? Why would they talk to me when they could choose someone with a great body?

For years I went through this, but more recently as I looked at myself in the mirror occasionally to check for body fat, I realised that this was my body. This was how it looked, and if I wanted to make it more muscle bound I could always go to the gym! Then one day recently, I questioned myself about this also. Why did I want to go to the gym to get bigger muscles and a flatter stomach? Was it that I needed to be able to do some heavy lifting, or was I going to be a boxer? No. I realised I wanted to build bigger muscles so that people would look at me and say “Wow! Nice muscles.”

Was I this shallow? Was what other people thought of me how I measured my life? This couldn't be right. I realised that even standing looking at myself at the mirror in my bathroom with no one to judge me, I was embarrassed. Why? Because I was comparing myself to some ideal, some perfection, that probably never even existed, save in the magazines or on tv. Yes, that had to be it.

We are always comparing ourselves to others, and when we don't feel as if we are matching up, we feel embarrassed, even if nobody has said anything to us. The damage that comparison is doing is far reaching and is engrained firmly in our minds.

Comparison

1. Relation based on similarities and differences

So why do I compare? Well it's not all about male and female body parts – who's got the best breasts, the best legs, the most rounded bottom, the biggest biceps – we compare everything in life. Who's got the best car, the best job, the biggest house. Whose football team scored the most goals last season; which company has the best burger? Who can drink more beer. Who can get the highest mark in the exam.

We compare everything. We take what we see as an ideal and we compare everything against it. My friend joe has a five bedroom house, I have a three bedroom house. In relation to him I am inferior. I earn £30,000 a year in my job, and my friend dave earns £18,000 a year, so in relation to me, he is worse off. My friend bob has two cars, and I only have one; that makes me inferior to him.

Do you see what is happening here? Instead of saying it is what it is, we say “I must see if I am superior or inferior to someone else.” I think to myself, “I got my wife a ring for christmas this year, but it is only a small one. I hope she doesn't find out that her friend's husband bought his wife a much bigger ring, as she will be jealous and think less of me as a man.”

Think of it another way. I weigh 75 kilos. Is that fat or is that slim? I don't know unless I compare it to someone else or someone “helpfully” suggests that the norm is 65 kilos, so I feel embarrassed about being overweight. Remember there can be no embarrassment in isolation, it always exists in relationship.

How big is my house? It is adequate for what I require. It has a bedroom, a lounge, and a kitchen and I am satisfied. But one day I go to my friend's house and he has six bedrooms, two lounges, and a swimming pool. I examine this relationship and compare the two. As I know that my house is smaller than his, I feel embarrassed or inadequate about asking him to come over to my house. Do you see?

Before we compare, all is perfect; but as soon as we start to compare, the “me” gets in the way and says “Oh, look at the size of his house, I should feel embarrassed about the size of my house.” So we end up always competing and comparing our whole lives when actually none of it matters.

Why do we care what people think of our house or our possessions, unless we want to impress them? Do true friends really care about how big your house is? We would like to think it is only shallow (*lacking depth of intellect or knowledge; concerned only with what is obvious*) people who are concerned with what they can see, but we have to be careful we do not engage in it ourselves.

It is what it is

*A car is a car, a house is a house
A muscle is a muscle, a friend is a friend*

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

We should not be comparing what are really just superficial objects – it makes no sense. Everything just is. Your bottom is a bottom, it is not a fat or thin bottom; it is just a bottom. The only reason you would get embarrassed about it is if you compare it to others, and conclude you are, in fact, not normal. It is what it is. Nothing more. It is the “me” that compares everything because it is clinging to the desire for status, and for recognition, that is all. Otherwise why would it matter what size your house is, how much money your friend earns, or what size your bottom is.

We are all concerned that we don’t measure up! To what? There is nothing to measure up to. You are a perfect wonderful human being, and once you become aware of that fact, the “me” will have nothing to cling to and will slowly disappear forever. Let go of embarrassment. You have nothing to be embarrassed about.

But just a little bit of advice. You will know when embarrassment is rearing its ugly head again because if you pay careful attention to the movement of your thoughts, you will observe that once again you have been engaged in the business of comparing. Stop it!

[Back to Index](#)

Evil

- 1. Morally objectionable behaviour*
- 2. That which causes harm or destruction or misfortune*
- 3. The quality of being morally wrong in principle or practice*

Man has always been superstitious about the presence of evil forces in the universe, but whether they exist in reality is another matter. What does exist everywhere is Man's thinking, and that definitely causes harm! In the religious texts there is always a reference to good vs. evil, god vs. the devil. The devil is portrayed as an ugly monster with horns, but that's just an artists impression; just like the paintings of Jesus and angels who are painted as beautiful. Black vs. white. We just can't help ourselves. We constantly compare good vs. bad, right vs. wrong.

But let's think about this for a moment carefully, shall we? Who is it who decides what is good and what is evil? Of course it's our old friend Mr Homo sapiens, and in particular, the powerful leader types who want to show us what is right and what is wrong.

So let's not get carried away with thinking that "evil" exists as a real entity as it is portrayed by Hollywood and the religious organisations. If anything, "evil" (I don't like to use the word as it is fairly meaningless in itself) should be regarded as an individual state of mind or a way of thinking.

Unfortunately, presidents and church leaders go around calling whole countries "evil" which doesn't do a lot to further a peaceful world. "Who are you calling evil? We'll show you!" And recently one president who shall remain nameless called a group of countries the axis of evil (*a group of countries in special alliance*), and set out to destroy them. But we shouldn't let these stupid people interrupt our discussion. Just because they want to divide and conquer the world doesn't mean we have to follow them does it?

But follow them, some people do, firm in their brainwashed belief that the countries (and everyone in them) are evil people. They are no such thing. They are human beings just like ourselves. Sure there may be a few of them whose thinking is extreme, but then who could honestly say that there aren't thousands of people like that in their own country? No, as usual it's just another way to keep everyone in fear of everyone else, and a nice excuse to flex your military muscle and ask for more money for the armed forces. But we see through their little game don't we?

Apart from the obvious real devil idea, created by the powerful to keep the world on its best behaviour, someone had the bright idea to invent morals.

Morals

1. *Motivation based on ideas of right and wrong*

This was going to be how people should lead their lives. And if they didn't, their morally objectionable behaviour could be classed as evil. But we must break through these childish man-made ideas – which have been round our necks like a noose for thousands of years – if we are to progress as a species.

"It's a sin," they cry, "they should be burnt at the stake," but as usual, sin is just another man-made idea, no matter what is written in the old books. Remember they are old books. They are past and we live now in the moment. All of these man-made ideas on what a sin (*an act that is regarded by theologians as a transgression of God's will*) is, and what is morally wrong, are beginning to become a little bit tedious, don't you think? Or do you think there really is a God, who gave us a rule book, and told us that no matter what happened, we mustn't deviate from it?

Do the animals have a rule book from God? After all, if God created the animals, fish and the birds (not forgetting the insects and the microbes), the rules must apply to them. But oh no, these rules only apply to the human species of animal, somewhat strangely.

"It is morally wrong to have sex before you're married" say your parents, but who are they? Just two people who followed the rules, they don't know the truth, and even if they did, they can't just tell it to you, you have to find out for yourself. So throw away your guide book and start exploring for yourselves, please!

I hate to keep going on about power and control because I am sure you are tired of hearing it, and I'm tired of writing about it. But who is it that tells you what is right and wrong? Sure, your religious text books for one, but forgive me for saying; they are just books. We are the most intelligent species on the planet, surely we don't need a book to tell us what is right and wrong?

If we live in compassion, with love for all beings, then you don't need a book to tell you "thou shalt not steal," because you won't. You don't need a government or a church to tell you that this or that is a sin, and

that god will punish you, you have no fear, because you are aware, and with that awareness you have insight, which will guide you in life.

Take a look at the people telling you about morals and sins – the religious leaders and the politicians! They lie and they cheat, they claim riches for themselves, they are involved in sexual scandals, but don't take my word for it, just pick up a newspaper in any country, any week and there they are in all their glory, for all to see. But somehow they always manage to weasel out of trouble due to friends in high places (no I'm not talking about god).

But there are people who believe that the devil has possessed them, and these are strange cases. I for one believe that there are different energies in the planet, some so negative, they affect the balance of nature; but we should not think it is an actual devil (*an evil supernatural being*) that has taken over the body of some unfortunate, as we must throw away superstition in order to find out the truth for ourselves.

There are people who rape and murder children and we call them evil, but although we should be sorry that anyone has died, we must remember it is the mind that controls actions, and these people need help. We must offer them our compassion, for if we call for them to be executed or tortured for what they did, then we become the monsters. Do you understand?

I know that there are people in the world who carry out some horrible acts towards other humans or animals, but their minds are sick; in order to help the world heal, we must help them heal too, no matter how horrific the act is to us.

The end of evil

No good. No bad. No righteous. No evil. Just a state of mind. Can you see? All of these things exist in the mind of the perceiver. "He is a good man," or "he is an evil man," are just people's perceptions backed up by religious or political laws and accepted ways of behaving.

So what am I? Am I a good man or an evil man?

In many topics I have talked about the destructive force the church has had on the human race for thousands of years. I have talked about how these organisations are created by powerful men in order to control the population; I have taken drugs; I have been with a prostitute; I have been an adulterer; I have stolen; I have cheated; I have lied; I have been greedy; and I have desired women and money (not a bad cv) so what am I? Am I morally objectionable? Am I evil? Should I be cast out into hell. What do you think?

Actually, I think I am a compassionate person who loves all of humanity, and I have made choices. I won't say they were wrong choices, just choices with consequences. Did I regret taking drugs? Did I wish I had never taken them? Do I want to be redeemed (*saved from the bondage of sin*) by god? No thanks, in fact I enjoyed every minute of it (until the next day when I felt like I was going to die, but that is the consequence, the cost of the pleasure).

Did I regret having sex with a prostitute? With hindsight, I thought it was pretty stupid, and I was displeased with myself for paying for sex with a stranger, but at the time I enjoyed it. I regret (*feel remorse for; feel sorry for; be contrite about*) nothing, but I have learned from everything. They were not mistakes. I made choices, that's all.

But you, you who read this, may want to judge me for my choices, or tell me I'll be in trouble come judgement day. But that's the thing with religion, it doesn't even leave you alone even when you're six feet underground!

So back to my original question. Am I evil? Surely if you look up your little rule book of what to do and what not to, I must have done some serious sinning, or at least broken most of the moral laws?

But I don't care. Your book means nothing. Do you understand? There is no right and wrong, just opinion. "Ah, but it must be right if the whole country believes it," says one of you. But were the armies in germany in the right when they gassed millions of people to death? They believed it! They believed they had a "moral" duty to rid the world of the jewish people, and they wouldn't have done it if they didn't believe they were right.

So before you start judging me or anyone else it's time to have a look inside that big brain of yours and see who's really been brainwashed!

"This book is outrageous! It should be taken off the shelves immediately," I can hear some of you saying.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

“This is a moral outrage! He should be locked up for writing this.”

But can you see what’s happening in your mind? You are applying all of your conditioning by society; you are not thinking with true intelligence, which is insight. If you were, you would see that by calling something “a moral outrage” you are standing in judgement of someone based on your own opinion, because that’s all it is.

And even if you think the whole country believes it, or it is against the law, remember what we were saying about a whole country believing something just because somebody told them it was right? You could see that gassing millions of people wasn’t love or compassion, it was just murder. But if you tried telling that to the german population at the time, who would have listened? It is exactly the same with these discussions.

So let us stop calling people evil. Let’s stop condemning people based on our ideas of right and wrong and calling them sinners; heck it’s not even your own opinion, it comes second hand from a book. That’s not very intelligent is it? Go into the world and throw down your rule books. Open your eyes to nature and experience what nature’s love is all about. But please stop saying things are immoral or sinful, it’s just childish, and it hurts people.

*Evil is all in the mind
Morals are all in the mind
Sin is all in the mind
But humans, we are real
Let’s start living like it*

[Back to Index](#)

Evolution

1. *A process in which something passes by degrees to a different stage (especially a more advanced or mature stage)*
2. *(biology) the sequence of events involved in the evolutionary development of a species or taxonomic group of organisms*
3. *Group of organisms*

There will always be an ongoing argument between religions and scientists as to whether humans evolved from simple organisms, over several billion years, or indeed whether they were created, just as they look now, by a supernatural all powerful god. I do not want to start this discussion by agreeing or disagreeing with the theory of evolution and natural selection; everyone has their own opinion, and you would find yourselves closed to this discussion if you were on the opposite side of my opinion! I do not want to talk about whether darwin, or the creationists were right. I wish to go much deeper into our conditioned minds, and explore with you how we came to arrive at our opinions, and then use our creative minds to move forward; to advance our minds. To shift our thinking.

I have not studied religion or the theories of evolution in any great detail, but I have not blindly accepted or rejected either; rather, I have investigated it with my own mind to find out the truth. I do not believe in absolutes, and so, if the mind is to remain open, there can be no absolute truth.

With both accounts of how we humans arrived here, the evolutionists and the creationists will show *overwhelming* evidence to support their findings. And although it is important to know where we came from, for us to understand the origins of life, (whether created by a god or whether simple organisms evolved into complex ones), the fact remains that even if one is proved “true,” there will always be someone who firmly believes the other.

It is this firm belief by people who have not investigated it themselves that concerns us here, not whether life was created in seven days or four billion years.

If I told you I had investigated it, and have concluded that evolution was how Man was created, what would you say if you believed that god was the creator? Your conditioned mind would instantly jump in and shout, “Nonsense! He doesn’t know what he’s talking about.”

Do you find it strange that so many people just blindly believe what they’ve been told? And not only believe it, but actively share their opinion with others, as if it is their own discovery? Why do we do that? We are the most intelligent species on the planet. We have the capacity for learning and discovering, yet we consistently just accept the writings of one “learned” man, or accept the teachings of professors as absolute truths.

There may be more physical evidence that Man evolved from simple organisms, but who is to say that there isn’t one super-intelligent supernatural being who whimsically created life on earth? The key here is belief. The blind belief that what someone says or writes must be true because it has been accepted.

Many brilliant scientists who were revered over the ages, have been proved wrong, again and again, because someone else investigated it themselves at a later date. Einstein proved some of isaac newton’s theories incorrect; and who knows, maybe in the next hundred years, or maybe even tomorrow, someone will come up with a new theory that supercedes einstein’s.

Investigation, not blind belief, will help us evolve psychologically. Blind belief in science, or in religion cannot advance us. Only by allowing ourselves to be open to the possibilities of what *could be*, can we truly advance our minds.

In the years since man has populated this planet, we have constantly evolved, not so much physically in the last few thousand years, but psychologically. We have used our brains to develop into a more advanced civilisation – albeit rapidly – in the last two hundred years. Scientific discoveries have lead to the invention of the motor car, the aeroplane, computers, telecommunication systems, space travel, skyscrapers, and electricity for all. You only have to look around you to see the marvellous discoveries we humans have made.

And whether through engineering, chemistry, mathematics, physics or biology, progress has only been possible through the ingenuity of Man, and his willingness to experiment, to investigate, and to not believe everything he has been told before. This is what separates us from the animal kingdom – our ability to use our imaginations; to imagine, possibilities.

So please can you tell me why we constantly fight for the supreme position of knowledge of the creation of life on earth? Why do we try to control human minds, to make them accept that one story is true or not. Why would you try to tell someone that life was created in seven days, and not as a long difficult process, when you have not investigated the truth of it yourself? Is that helping us advance, by limiting the minds of our children, by making them blindly believe?

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

We must allow everyone to investigate for themselves, not to condition their minds with our opinions. Please think about this carefully, and watch your mind as you are reading this. If you instantly jump in with a “this is nonsense, everyone knows that evolution is how we got here,” it is as worthless as “only god could have created this earth.” We must find out for ourselves.

If we are deeply interested to know how we got here, we must not accept what we are told, or pass our opinions on to other people, as if they are absolute truths. We must use our minds to investigate, and in that deep investigation, we may find what we are looking for.

Life is small steps
Life is not absolute. Life is a process.

I wrote in the introduction to the book that nothing I write is absolute truth nor to be blindly followed; and that this book is not the final word in being human. In the process that is my life, I have reached a stage where I want to make my small contribution to the future, and it may be that in several years, or even tomorrow, someone will write a book that is more advanced than I could ever hope or dream to be. That is evolution; that is the advancement of our human civilisation. Taking small steps, progressing in every way.

According to evolutionary theorists, the state of the world today may well be addressed sometime in the future, by natural selection, and that all the wrongs will be righted, by mother nature herself. And for the creation theorists, it may well be that god has a grand design for everything, happy to let the world carry on as it is, until he feels it is time to intervene. But if you believed either of them, you wouldn't be You. You wouldn't be the magnificent, amazing collection of atoms that you are. You wouldn't be human. Because Man now has control of his own destiny, and that of the planet. We have the power in our minds, to create or to destroy.

Although it would be nice to think that god, or nature, will make it all better, and we will all start being gradually nice to each other over the next 250,000 years, I think we have to face facts, that although small steps are what has allowed us to progress to where we are today, we have come to a crucial stage in our development as a human race, where we can't wait for evolution or god to help.

We need to intervene. We need to take a big step, and that step, I would like to call a shift. A shift in thinking. And with that shift comes action: Immediate action. We don't have to wait to see the results in ten years or fifty years. We will start to see the changes filter through the world immediately. Can you imagine it? A more compassionate, loving, sustainable world for all who live here. For me and you and for all future generations...

I'm sure most of you reading this might say, “Well, it would be nice if something good happened, and there is suddenly no more hate, greed, poverty, hunger, or war, but it's not going to happen, these problems have been around long before me, and will probably be around for thousands of years after me. It's just human nature; you've just got to do the best you can.” And there are millions who would agree with you. “We don't want the world to be a bad place to live in, but what can we do?”

Most people see the problems of the world as too huge to take on and deal with, but the problems are not with the world, they are rooted firmly in the minds of the individual. Each and everyone of us. Me, you, the thief, the warlord, the soldier, the politician, the factory worker, the office manager, the florist, the green grocer, the supermarket shelf stacker, the serial killer, the arsonist, the teacher, the parent and the child. We are all individuals, with individual thinking, able to change.

We all talk of wanting to change something about ourselves, but we see it as a long process, not as something that is effective immediately. It's not the change itself which takes time, it is the time we take to get to the point of wanting to change! It is by starting to notice things about ourselves we do not particularly like or want to improve, that gives us the impetus to change.

A shift in thinking

Let's go into this a little more deeply together, shall we? We have said that change in the individual mind is an instantaneous process, after we have made the decision to change something about ourselves. Right now,

many of you will be saying “I’d like to, but it’s difficult” or “why should I change,” but it is only the mind’s resistance to the change that is making it difficult.

Take driving to work as an easy example. You inform yourself about the harm the motor car is doing to the planet, and you decide not to use the car every day to go to work. Instead, for one day a week, you use public transport, cycle or walk. It’s a nice idea. It gets you out in the fresh air, you are responsible for less pollution, less petroleum consumption, less traffic, less stress. Hey! You’re really doing a great thing! That is until the helpful brain steps in.

“What if it’s raining? I’ll get wet, and it’s a real pain walking to the bus stop, and it’s quite expensive, and the car is much more comfortable, and I feel safer in my car, and I don’t have to share my car with hundreds of people, and anyway I like my car, I can listen to music...”

Blah, blah, blah... You see, the brain doesn’t like change too much, it gets used to its comfort and doesn’t like to be troubled too much by all this talk of change.

“It’s much too difficult you see. I’d like to, but I knew it would be too difficult, and anyway, everyone else is using their cars, so why should I stop using mine? I paid quite a lot of money for my car, and anyway, I thought having a car was progress, I don’t see it as great progress if I have to start walking again. My grandfather didn’t have a car, and his life was difficult, I don’t see why I should make my life more difficult. Anyway what difference would it make if it’s just me not using my car for one day be? It all seems kind of pointless to me.”

And there it is. The lazy brain wins, no question about it.

Now that example was just about not taking the car to work for one day. Imagine if the example had been switching to a meat free diet, turning your back on a consumer lifestyle, not watching tv each night, doing a job that helped others around the world progress, not just you, understanding and transcending anger, being compassionate to all, or not working for any company that had anything to do with making or selling guns or military weapons; and you start to see that it becomes almost an impossible task on the face of it.

If you can’t get over using your car for just one day, how are you going to deal with the big stuff? Well, it’s all big stuff, but all we can do is deal with it on an individual basis. The only way to deal with any problem is to break it down to manageable pieces. We all have different lives, although we are all connected. Some poor, some rich, some happy, some sad, some violent, some peaceful. But the one thing that makes us all the same, is we all have the capacity for change.

Big steps – Big shift

“Why should I do it? I’m quite happy the way I am!”

No one is forcing you to change; no change can come from outside of you. You can apply pressure all you want, but in the end, it is the individual mind that must change. If you apply pressure to your prime minister to stop sending troops to a foreign country, and he eventually decides to stop it, it is not that he has given in, it is that he has processed the information available, and made the change in his mind. Remember, that change can only be in the individual mind.

We may act as a group, but that group is just a collective of individual minds, all able to change the way they think, instantaneously. If you are part of a gang of thugs, and the group decides to beat up an old man, you as an individual have the power *not* to be a part of it. You are making a choice to join the group, to kick and punch the old man as he’s lying on the ground. If you make a choice to stop in your mind, the change is instantaneous, is it not?

Many of you reading this will still be saying “Ok, but I can’t see how changing will do any good, after all it’s just me changing; if everyone else is still doing the same thing, what good will it do?” and I can see your point. On the surface, it looks hopeless if it’s only you changing, but imagine if you were a street robber and through understanding yourself more and starting to feel compassion for other people, you decided again never to rob anyone in the street. That would have a big effect, wouldn’t it?

When I decided to take a big step and become vegetarian, many of my friends said, “Why are you bothering, they are just going to kill the animals anyway, so it doesn’t matter if I eat them, or someone else eats them.” Unfortunately, this is the kind of defeatist attitude that is so prevalent in the world today. They

are going to do it anyway, so I may as well join them, there's nothing I can do...

I will tell you why I became a vegetarian.

For nearly thirty years, I happily chewed my way through hundreds of sirloin, rump and fillet steaks. I ate pork chops, chicken breasts, bacon, and loved sausages. In fact, I ate every kind of meat there was. I never considered it wrong to be doing so.

My parents – whom I respected – provided me with food on the table, and as it tasted pretty good, I ate it. If anyone had ever told me not to eat it, I would probably have been annoyed and told them “Man is a meat eater, and I can eat whatever I like!”

The first vegetarian I met was someone I later married, and although I couldn't understand why she was a vegetarian, I respected her, so didn't question her about it. She did take a lot of stick for being a non-meat eater (and a non-drinker/non-smoker), and because she was my girlfriend, stuck up for her (even though I thought it was pointless being a vegetarian).

For a couple of years, I kept eating meat and she never asked me to stop, until one day, whilst cutting up a huge piece of meat at a pub we were working, I suddenly realised that what I was cutting up used to be alive, and this was flesh, the same as mine. The blood that was all over the sink was just like mine, and I was treating this (now dead) animal as merely a tasty steak.

I started to imagine it alive, grazing in the fields, then I imagined it being killed. Just another cow, in a long line of cows to be killed, that day and every day. At that moment, I felt compassion.

Compassion

1. A deep awareness of and sympathy for another's suffering

2. The humane quality of understanding the suffering of others and wanting to do something about it

I knew that over thousands of years, Man has been hunting animals for food. In the beginning they had no idea about agriculture, they merely hunted animals, and gathered whatever else they could. I also knew, that according to evolutionary theorists, the reason Man's brain grew to its present size was possibly thanks to the proteins in meat. So if Man hadn't eaten meat it, the theory states that I would probably not be here with a brain big enough to have self-awareness and discuss compassion with you!

But that was yesterday. We are now in the position where we don't need meat to survive, even if it is true that we did in the past. In fact we can get all the proteins we need from beans like soya amongst others, and we are able to produce vegetables in sufficient quantity that no one need go hungry. And in a moment, my mind changed from the hunter of 30,000 years ago to a man standing in a kitchen over a piece of a flesh that had been delivered in a van, wrapped in plastic and cut to size.

I realised I was no longer a hunter, merely a consumer of tasty meats. I knew in that instant that all the millions of animals being killed in the intense factory farming was not only wrong, it was inhuman. We had progressed throughout a bloodied history, fighting and killing for thousands of years to this point, and still we killed each other, and killed anything we could eat.

I decided to make a shift; a change that was immediate, required no thought, no mulling over, no long drawn out battles with my brain over the pros and cons of eating meat. I had no long discussions with my friends about whether killing animals was morally right or wrong, whether Man was a carnivore, omnivore or herbivore – those things didn't matter.

What mattered, was at the time, I felt compassion, and I shifted my thinking into that of one who feels compassion for all living animals (and by the same token, without consciously thinking about it, shifted my thinking into showing compassion for all humans on the planet; thereby making it highly unlikely I would ever hold a gun, go to war, or be responsible for the death of another). I understood what it is to be human, our ability to show compassion for another living being. Lions kill zebras because they do not have the capacity to choose whether to be carnivores or herbivores. We do.

Look at all those BIG things that came out of one SMALL shift!

I don't miss eating meat. I made the shift and moved on. It doesn't help to keep thinking "Maybe I should start eating meat again, maybe I'm missing out on something." I don't eat meat and that's the end of it. Move on.

I am not suggesting you must stop eating meat, that was a personal shift for me, and me alone. I do not try to convince others to stop eating meat. Remember when we discussed that only an individual shift in thinking, will make a lasting difference?

People will always try something for a while, but inevitably go back to what they were doing before, as it's more comfortable. Why? Because until you make a shift (which is comparable to moving up a gear in your car) your good old brain will try to offer you a way out of conflict (should I /shouldn't I) by suggesting you go back to your old way of thinking, which results in action.

So instead of asking yourself the same old question "What is good for me?" Maybe we should be asking ourselves the question "Is what I am thinking or doing, helping to make the world a more compassionate, peaceful, sustainable place for me, and future generations of my family to live in? Or am I just living for today, getting what I can out of life for me; using people and the earth's resources to give me an easier, more comfortable life?"

It is fair to say that Man would not have got where he is today, without doing things which were not compassionate, but that is yesterday. We may live longer, thanks to the availability of more healthy food and better medicine. We may be able to visit more places in the world, and travel often, thanks to the invention of technologies such as the car, train and plane. We may live in better housing thanks to better building techniques. We may be richer, thanks in part, to the industrial revolution. We may have better schools, and we may even be more humane than we were; but in our constant striving for progress, we have forgotten one thing – to show compassion and love for everything on our planet.

We live in a finely balanced world, which science is beginning to show has taken billions of years to evolve (whoever/whatever the original creator was, it doesn't really matter), and still we fight with each other constantly. We destroy individuals, families and cities through war. We drink alcohol and take drugs to make us "relax." We seek power and control over others. We hate, we waste, we kill, we envy, we are greedy, we are afraid. We may have progressed externally, but when you examine it carefully, it begins to look as if we have the brain of our cavemen ancestors in a twenty first century body.

As we discussed earlier, we are at a crucial stage in our development, where fear and violence is rife. We cannot wait for a third party (god/evolution) to step in. We must shift our thinking, one by one, country by country, continent by continent, until we allow compassion and love into our hearts.

This is not something your government will help you with, nor your friends, nor your religion (many hundreds of wars have been started in the name of god). This is something you must do, for the benefit of yourself and your fellow earth dwellers.

The key to this shift in thinking is in stepping out of the "me" for a while; allowing yourself to watch how you think for a moment, and reaching deep inside, to feel just two things: Compassion and love. They are both qualities that are within all of us, which some of you may have already found but others need to find. We have discussed this in more detail in separate topics, but without them we are less than human.

Shift 1 – Learning to observe yourself in action in your environment.

Shift 2 – Learning to love yourself and show compassion to all around you.

Shift 3 – Identifying one thing you feel passionate about and make a shift. Don't wait.

Change is contagious. You will be amazed at how one small shift in thinking can cause a ripple effect that can be felt everywhere. It may not be apparent at first, but slowly, the compassion and love you feel for others, will filter through society (which is you and me), your family and your friends.

Imagine if you shifted your thinking on just one thing!

For example, stopping using supermarkets and only buying local organic produce. Think of the ripple effect worldwide. There will be some upheaval, but anyone who tells you to think of the job losses around the world and the chaos, doesn't know much about the amazing adaptability of the human mind. What will

concern you more, is that massive amounts of food will not be available to you 24 hours a day. “Where will I do my shopping? I’m too busy to go to different shops. It’s so inconvenient!” But don’t let that worry you for now, you have forgotten how amazing you are. You are a survivor. Your genes have successfully been passed from generation to generation through war, famine, disease, and hunger. I’m sure you will think of something!

Let’s look together at how this small shift in thinking affects the world, because that’s all it is, thinking, and look at the dramatic effects this has in action, in reality. Buying organic food means no harmful pesticides are used, and if you don’t buy food that have been sprayed with chemicals, there will be no need to make pesticides anymore. It also means that no one has genetically modified your food, thereby eliminating the need to have companies doing weird things to your tomatoes; after all, the tomato has been around for a long time and got on pretty well without having its genes modified.

Sure, genetic modification supposedly makes plants resistant to some diseases, but are the – so far – unquantifiable benefits to the human race worth the unknown cost of fiddling with the genes in our food? Especially when we don’t know how this affects the planet’s global ecology. Farmers using only organic pest treatment will learn to work with nature to combat disease. We have the skills and technology to do this already. Buying locally means you are helping to keep agriculture local, buying products that are grown by local farmers, for the local community. If you live in a modern city, this may mean purchasing products that have been transported countrywide due to the space available.

Food grown for the domestic market will be fresher and have to travel less. At the moment, it is possible to go into your local supermarket and find very few items of fresh produce that have been grown in your local area, let alone the same country you live in. The current trend of importing fresh produce means you may be buying a lettuce which may have been grown five thousand kilometres from where you live, and transported via truck, aeroplane, and then another truck to get it to your supermarket.

Imagine the amount of fuel (an unsustainable resource) being used in the transportation of your lettuce. The pollution caused by emissions. The water used in growing and washing your lettuce in a country where land has been converted to grow food for export and may face its own water shortages. You may even buy too much and end up throwing some of it away. The benefits to all local communities would be huge by just choosing local produce. Maybe not financially in the short term, but as responsible citizens, shouldn’t we be looking at the long term?

You may also choose to grow some of your own fruit and vegetables, if you have a spare piece of land. Just imagine the satisfaction of having your own potatoes, strawberries, or carrots, fresh from your garden. It may seem time consuming, but if you dedicate time and energy to this, you will think less about wasting any, something that happens on a massive scale every day in western industrialised countries. Food is cheap and always available, and we have become blasé, happy to buy two boxes of strawberries from across the globe and throw one away because it went off as you bought too much. Easy come easy go...

When you buy local organic produce, you know you are buying seasonal produce as well and you will look forward to this year’s new apples or strawberries when it is their season, and not just expect that everything be available all year round just because you want it. You learn to wait and then appreciate the seasonal produce.

You will be cutting down on massive amounts of packaging that is necessary to carry your products thousands of miles, thereby saving our valuable resources – oil for plastics, metal for cans, and trees for paper and cardboard. You may realise that you don’t need to buy products just because they are for sale, and you will begin to eat more healthily, cutting down on processed foods that have been made in huge factories, and begin to learn the art of cooking again.

More local people will be encouraged to reopen local stores, who have been driven out of business by the huge supermarket chains. You will be free from the companies that control the world food supplies, by putting food production back into local community hands. I am not talking about businesses giving their food away cheaply to local people, indeed it may be more expensive than the supermarkets, but I can assure you that local food will taste better, and you will feel good about once again supporting local business in your community.

These are just some of the things that could happen if you just stopped going to your local supermarket and tried going back to local market shopping. If there isn’t a local market or food shops selling local produce, you could try talking to someone about starting it or opening your own!

But then again, that sounds a bit difficult, as you've had a hard day, you're tired, and you just want something quick to eat. You can't be bothered with all this nonsense, and it's best to leave it to someone else to fix it, and anyway what good is it for you to sacrifice yourself, when everyone else is going to the supermarket, and come to think of it, you like the supermarket, it's easy, convenient they always have what you want. It's cheap, and you get points on your loyalty card. "No!" say you, "I'm not going to change for anyone. It's a free country and if I want to shop at the supermarket. I *will!*" Well maybe you're not ready to shift your thinking, but if you don't who will?

You may wonder what stopping shopping at a supermarket has to do with love, compassion and evolution. On the surface – nothing! Compassion and love are human. Supermarkets sell cucumbers. Until you look at the list again above.

If you love the world you live in, and want to show compassion, you have to think about the people who have to work for next to nothing in non-industrialised countries to provide you with your cheap produce. And because you demand lower prices every day, the supermarket drives down the price they are prepared to pay for the goods. When you win on price, somebody else loses.

For you, it's just a bunch of cheap bananas, but for the person who works on the farm it's his livelihood. You may argue that if we didn't buy it he'd have even less, but as I have consistently discussed with you, the human being is the most intelligent being on the planet, he is resourceful and adaptable.

They say that nature is the survival of the fittest, and that may well be true, but it doesn't mean we can exploit other human beings just so we can have cheap food we may or may not eat. If you show compassion and love, you also have to think about the planet we live on that we exploit every day. We use huge amounts of energy to power the machines that give you the consumer mass produced products; from sugary soft drinks, to biscuits; from cooking sauces to desserts; everything has been pre-made. We use plastics, water, oil, petroleum, wood, and metal, just so you can get a nice product, in a nice jar, with a nice label 24 hours a day, cheaper than you can make yourself, made a thousand kilometres away, that you use in five minutes, and then throw away the container.

Think about it with me for a moment.

In the time that Man has been on earth – whether he evolved from a tadpole, or came fully formed as a human being – all the evidence points to the fact that we have had a pretty hard struggle to make it this far. Without counting violent acts we have committed against each other, we have had to fight ice ages, floods, famine, disease, earthquakes, and volcanoes, amongst other obstacles that nature herself has thrown up; and against all the odds, we have made it! You and me.

We're alive, and we belong to the most intelligent species on earth. Homo sapiens, the human being. Whether we live in asia, africa, europe or the americas, don't you think now is the time we give thanks to our ancestors who managed to stay alive, despite the odds against it, and give birth to us? We must use this opportunity of a lifetime to begin to advance in our thinking and start to give birth not only to new children, but to a new level of compassion for our fellow inhabitants of this planet, quietly spinning in space; and a new level of awareness both of ourselves, and of the impact we are having on the planet for future generations.

Our ancestors left it in pretty good shape for us. Let's do the same for the next generation who come along.

***Without love and compassion I am empty
I feel nothing, I am merely a machine***

[Back to Index](#)

Executions

1. *Putting a condemned person to death*
2. *Unlawful premeditated killing of a human being by a human being*

He committed an offence punishable by death
It's the law

Even the bible says it, so I guess it's ok! An eye for an eye. And I'm sure other religions may have something similar? In our drive to become "civilised," the rulers of the separate nations of the world decided they needed some method of control over the population to make sure they conformed. And if you fell foul of the law, you could potentially pay the highest price – you could pay with your life.

The general public actually used to go – in several countries they still do – to hangings, and it was seen as a day out. "Watch the condemned man swing from the gallows!" said the advertisements. Quite a jolly affair really; leaving all citizens glad it wasn't them.

The most obvious offence to be executed for, was, and still is, murder, but it wasn't the only offence you could be executed for. Others included, treason, spying, or stealing (anything from a bird on someone's private land to someone's wallet). Suddenly people could be killed for any offence that the government decided should be punished by death. They had to keep control of the population, and made public examples of people, that would stop others from committing offences.

Various methods of execution have been used over the years, including the good old guillotine that just chops your head off and it rolls into a basket; to the more macabre, where you are hung by the neck until not quite dead, then taken down from the gallows, a knife cuts you, first down the middle, to open up your chest, and then, as I understand it, the knife is run the opposite way across your chest and your organs removed whilst you are still alive. Anyway, the purpose seems to make you suffer as long as possible before you die.

More boring methods of execution include hanging, where you just fall through a trapdoor and your neck snaps, or something like that; firing squad, where some expert marksmen shoot you through the heart; being wired up to an electric current with some kind of hat on that kind of cooks you from the inside (much like a turkey in the oven I guess), to the most mundane of all, "the lethal injection."

Come on! All that happens is that you lie down, some nice doctor gets two injections ready, he smiles at you like any normal doctor would, tells you to relax; and injects you with a really nice muscle relaxant. Once you're nice and asleep, he calmly puts another injection into your arm that just stops your heart, pretty similar to putting your dog to "sleep," I guess. Listen to these statements and see if you agree.

Death by hanging is murder
Death by lethal injection is murder
Death by firing squad is murder
Death by the electric chair is murder

Lots of "civilised" people still believe that death is perfectly acceptable for someone who kills someone else; after all, they made people suffer, so it's only right they should suffer. In principle, this seems straightforward until you understand that killing a murderer is still murder, made acceptable by the fact that you are tried by a court of your peers, and the whole process is done in a very civilised way! After all, this isn't the dark ages, they don't just hang a rope over a tree and hang you. You are innocent until proven guilty.

You had every chance before you committed the crime to think about the consequences of your actions, and you have every chance under the law to show you didn't do it. It's up to the prosecution to prove you did it. Then it's up to a jury (in countries where this exists) to consider the defence and prosecution cases, listen to the summing up of the lawyers, then debate it for as long as it takes to reach a majority decision. If you are found guilty by these men and women, you still have right of appeal, and it is finally up to a judge to determine what sentence should be passed. So it is fair to say that if the sentence is ultimately death, then that must be the final decision.

It has to be remembered though that most countries are beginning to see the death penalty for what it is. Murder (*unlawful premeditated killing of a human being by a human being*). Killing another human being is the most sickening of all events that happen in the human world. The deliberate act of taking life away from someone else. We will deal with the act of murder itself in another topic, but for now let us think about the act of execution.

When someone brutally strangles, shoots, stabs, or drowns another human being, we have to think that the person who did it was not thinking, indeed, I would say, was suffering from mental illness. In law, they have

to prove you knew exactly what you were doing; that you were not insane. Otherwise, you would be found not guilty, by reason of insanity.

We are the most intelligent species on the planet. We have the ability to show love, feel compassion and empathy for all other creatures, so when someone deliberately, or even in the heat of the moment, kills another human, it means something has gone wrong in the brain, don't you think? Something in the wiring is faulty. Whether you meant to do it or not means that your thinking has got so twisted, that you see killing as an option – not for food, but because of jealousy, desire, greed, anger, or hate. It doesn't matter if we classify it as a crime of passion or a crime committed by one with a sociopathic personality (*a personality disorder characterized by amorality and lack of affect; capable of violent acts without guilt feelings*).

I believe that the human brain is hard wired to feel compassion and love, so if you cold bloodedly gun down a shopkeeper because you want their money, kill a love rival, kill someone because they are from a different country, or have a different skin colour, your brain and your thinking must be faulty – given we are wired not to kill someone from our own species. If we were, humans would have been wiped out thousands of years ago.

Indeed, most other species do not kill their own. Why? Because in nature, we become hard wired to act in the best interests of our species. If lions all killed other lions, there would soon be no lions left. Does this make sense to you? It is not in the interest of any species to exterminate their own members.

It is interesting to note that the death penalty only applies to killing members of the human race; you can kill as many other life forms as you like, whether they suffer or not. You can torture animals, then cut them to pieces whilst they are still alive screaming in pain, and you may at worst receive a prison sentence. You can shoot animals for sport, like pheasants and deer (as long as it is in the right season), and no one will say a word to you. In fact it is practised regularly in some countries by the upper classes and members of the most civilised society.

So if it's acceptable to kill animals, why can't we kill humans? They're exactly the same; they have muscles, and a heart; they feel pain, and they are alive, just like the animals. Where is the difference?

We love animals, and show them compassion just as humans do to each other, but it's perfectly acceptable to kill them (as long as you obey the law). And that is where the difference lies. Law. We have made up some rules that everyone should follow, except these aren't global rules on conduct, they vary from country to country, from state to state. In the united states, if you kill someone on one side of the state border, you may find yourself lying down getting a lethal injection, and ten metres away on the other side, you will find yourself spending life in prison.

This is not about an eye for an eye, this is about where you live and who happens to be running the country at the time. This is not about morals, this is about power. This is not about justice, this is about control. Do you see? If killing another human being is the worst thing that another human can do, why is it acceptable to execute (kill) a human being because a man-made law says it is? One day the death penalty is used, the next year it's not, the next year it's reinstated.

If the death penalty is meant to be a deterrent, it certainly doesn't work. Every day, humans kill other humans in the name of love, war, god, peace, justice, or revenge; and in war, killing is a free for all, unless you happen to kill with a little too much cruelty, or use nasty weapons that make people suffer too much before they die. No. Killing in war is all right as long as you obey the rules.

“...and remember lads, I want a clean fair fight. If the enemy (another human) wants to kill you, make sure you get him first, but a straight head shot is preferable, instant death and all; we are not barbarians you know...”

Don't you think it's time to upgrade our brains? In specific circumstances, killing is all right, as long as it's within the law, but if someone kills a child, or murders several people in a killing spree, we demand they be punished to fullest extent. We want blood. But if it's a “just” war and the enemy gets killed, *that* is seen as a great triumph! We want to congratulate the soldiers, not punish them. The only difference is in the use of the word “law” and “justified” when we decide whether you should be punished with death for killing another human.

If we are to succeed as a planet, we must upgrade our thinking. We must learn to feel compassion for all forms of life on this planet. If we kill someone who kills, are we any better than them? Have we not

advanced enough as a civilisation that we can help people who commit terrible acts against our own species to think more clearly? Instead of murdering them to satisfy the baying mob, shall we not help the person to feel compassion and love for all others; and return them to society to show others the way forward?

Law makers would argue that they are not in the business of salvation, and that they are there only to make laws to protect others; but is it not our duty as fellow humans to end the cycle of violence that has existed for thousands of years?

When a man kills because of anger, greed, hate, or revenge, at least he is showing some form of emotion, and we can help him understand, and correct his thinking. When a judge sentences someone to death, are he and the executioner not acting more in line with the sociopathic personality? When the judge sentences the man to death, he shows no emotion, nor does the executioner; after all, it's only a job for them. They can go home with a clear conscience at night knowing they have seen justice done, and firmly believing they have done the right thing to help society.

I have only one question to ask the judges and executioners who may be reading this:

"If you sentence someone to death, or you pull the trapdoor lever, or administer the lethal injection, or pull the trigger, or switch on the electric chair, how do you feel as a human? Do you feel compassionate? Do you feel love when you see the man die, or does it not enter your head? Are you just doing your job, much like hitler's executioners in the second world war?"

The time is now to end this violence, to start to understand ourselves and the way we think; to progress as a planet and to protect our species. That means people changing the way they think so they never again feel the desire to harm another human being. Possible?

"Of course not," say some of you, "Man is violent and has always been violent, and there's only one way to deal with them, execute them."

But then you would be as violent as they are, even if you don't pull the trigger. We are all involved in this, and stopping executing people would be a first step to showing compassion on a global scale. Don't let your governments continue this violence. Just imagine if you were the one who made a terrible mistake in your thinking and were on death row right now, about to be violently murdered. How would you *feel*?

Wouldn't you want someone to give you a chance to understand why you were violent, and transcend it to become a more compassionate human being? Would you seize the chance, or would you prefer to die?

I will leave you with that thought.

[Back to Index](#)

Exercise

1. *The activity of exerting your muscles in various ways to keep fit*

Exercise is an interesting concept isn't it? I'm sure our ancestors, who toiled the lands every day for hours on end in order to grow food, would laugh when they saw all of us at our pilates, step aerobics, and spinning classes. Or what if they saw us spending hours in the gym, just to get exercise and get fit? It is laughable really, don't you think? Us standing in front of the tv going along with the latest craze in keep fit. "Yeah, I used to do tae-bo, but that's so last year..."

Fitness has become a fashion, and millions of dollars is spent on it every year by overweight, under-worked people, desperately trying to look "perfect," which of course never happens, because they were "too busy" to go last week, and "they've got a lot on, next week," and anyway, "it's not really working, I think I might try something else!"

What's going on? We are turning into a world of fat people, and before all you politically correct types start to get upset, let's go into this together, shall we? We are, at our core, an animal just like the other animals who live on the planet. Physiologically we're no different. We have bones, fat, and muscle just like a lion, or a tiger. Now, how many of you have seen fat lions?

Over the millions of years we have been evolving, our bodies have turned into lean, delicately balanced machines, with just the right quantities of everything. We can increase muscle to make ourselves stronger, but can someone tell me what putting on fat does for us, unless it's to keep us warm at night perhaps?

Be proud to be fat!
Big and lovin' it!

Unfortunately, some overweight celebrities in western countries seem to be promoting that it's ok to be fat. Now we have fat people just accepting they are fat, and that's it. I am not anti fat people, I just want you to be aware that it is not our natural state. Being fat means just one thing – you eat too much of the wrong thing (unless you have a "disorder," in which case, accept my apologies).

You crave animal fats, sugars, simple carbohydrates, anything processed, sugary drinks, and beer – the list goes on and on. "Oh I've always had a problem with my weight, I just can't seem to shift it," or "it's probably genetic, my father was a big man too," and many other excuses. You may not even want to lose weight. It may not be important to you. But recognise one thing. Not eating fatty foods doesn't make you fat. Doing physical work does not make you fat.

Let's go back to talking about your natural state. The one where the whole body is in balance.

Being overweight puts more strain on the system physically, makes you slothful (*disinclined to work or exertion*), and dulls the mind, but today's sedentary lazy lifestyles in the western developed countries are seen as a privilege, something we have worked towards, something we could say we have earned.

No longer do we have to toil in the fields, now we can sit back and enjoy ourselves and eat. And watch tv. And sit. And eat. And drive in the car. And sit. And eat. So something must have changed to allow us to do this. After all, if you are out working in the fields all day, the likelihood of becoming overweight, is, if you'll pardon the pun, "slim."

Work has moved from the hand to the mind

That is precisely what has changed in western civilisation. No longer is everyone out toiling all day. Now, lots of us have jobs which don't require any physical work at all – even those who do manual jobs now use machines to assist with any heavy work – and coupled with the rise in working hours demanded by employers, and the easy accessibility of processed fast food (*anything not home made*), is it any wonder we have become obese?

"Hold on a minute," says you, "what about all the office workers in asia, you do not notice they are fat, and yet they work long hours, have easy access to fast food, and don't do much physical work, why aren't they fat?"

That is a good question, but for that, we will have to look, not at a genetic predisposition to be slim

(because as you will remember, being slim is our natural state), but at their choice of foods.

Their diet is made up almost entirely of low fat products, including lots of vegetables, and their diet is free (in the main) from dairy products which are made from animal fats, whereas our diet is high in dairy products; from cheese to yoghurt; from milk to creamy sauces and ice cream. The thing is, we just don't seem to be able to cook without dairy products. I include eggs in this, even though they are not strictly dairy, as they go hand in hand with things like butter and milk when cooking.

Give up dairy products? Never!

We are addicted to dairy products and we don't even seem to realise it. I gave up dairy for good this year, and although I consider myself a versatile cook, I really struggled with some recipes I used to like making. Nearly all had dairy products in them. Even a basic lasagne needs milk and butter to make the white sauce, and grated cheese for the topping.

So, with my old recipes out the window, I embarked on finding new ways of cooking and I started to realise that what I was eating (even as a vegetarian) was so heavily influenced by dairy, which is unfortunately full of fat. I discovered that getting used to not eating animal fats was pretty easy, although my mind did start craving things like milk chocolate, yoghurt, and cheese. It amazed me that I was actually craving specific types of food, and I could only put it down to the animal fats I was eating.

In the days when people were labouring all day, they probably didn't notice they were eating so much fat, as they were burning the same or more energy than they were taking in; but with the almost slothful work that is undertaken by most people in western developed countries (I am not saying that people don't work hard, just that they don't use their physical labour as much as they used to) and the odd hours we keep, eating is done whenever we get a chance. Sometimes eaten on the go, and sometimes eaten late at night before bed (alcohol, which is fattening is also mostly drunk late evening), and surprise surprise, we start putting on weight.

We then notice one day that our clothes feel a little tighter, we start to see a few bulges, where there didn't use to be any, but we're much too busy to worry about it. What's a little more fat? We can always lose it next week. But of course we're always much too busy. We have stressful lives. We don't have time to think about losing weight, until one day we decide to do something about it, by which time we have put on so much that we can't just lose it in a week. So we panic.

"How can I lose weight? How do I look? I look terrible. My clothes don't fit me any more. I need to get slim!" So we join a gym, go to an aerobics class, go on a crash diet, get a personal trainer, buy a book, or a dvd by a famous celebrity who has never been fat, and buy slim shakes to drink. We are desperate and now we'll try anything.

The diet companies start rubbing their hands in glee! Woo hoo! Another customer who has eaten too much fat, too much sugar, and never does any exercise. So they milk us for everything we have (pardon the pun). They sell us a diet dream to look wonderful again in just thirty days! No catch! They are making a fortune out of us selling us fat food, and the same companies are making a fortune selling us the healthy alternatives after we've become too fat!

I wonder how many of you have tried to lose weight in the past. Recently I have noticed that I have been putting on weight, although only in the tummy area, fortunately, and I am now making sure I return to my system's optimum weight in the soonest possible time. Excess weight brought on by sitting writing this book for over two years, doing little exercise, and eating too many dairy products! I am well on the way, now I am eating no dairy, and only wholegrain cereals and breads, beans and pulses, steamed vegetables and rice, local pearled spelt, or barley, but more on that in another topic.

It just seems to me that we are behaving in the complete reverse of what is good or indeed essential for the system, by eating way too much for the amount of exercise we do. We subsequently put on weight, become lethargic and unhappy with ourselves, and our mind loses its sharpness, as our system spends its whole day in a state of digestion. Breakfast. Mid morning snack. Lunch. Mid afternoon snack. Dinner. Late evening snack (and perhaps alcohol).

Cutting down on eating, not only helps you to look good and feel good, it helps your mind stay more focussed and become clearer. You are a perfect finely tuned human being, and clogging up your body with

fat makes it harder for your perfect system to operate.

Would you deliberately add butter to your car engine if all it needed to run was petrol? Think about it. Given that we are here now, and there is no going back to start again, we must start to look at what kind of fuel our body needs, how often, and how much, and we must balance the amount we eat with exercise; walking or running for example. Not only does exercise burn calories, but it releases well needed endorphins to make you feel good too! It can also help clear your mind of any stresses and strains, turning cotton wool thinking into razor sharp clarity.

I mentioned running as a good choice of exercise (although the “experts” may not agree with me), because I have been doing it for the last 27 years, and have found it to be of great benefit for body and mind. And as it is done outdoors (preferably in a green space), it helps us to reconnect with our natural state, away from the madness of western style city living.

Clear your mind. Clear your arteries. Get rid of the fat in your diet. Get rid of the fat on your body. Become the truly amazing human being you already are, you just need a little push in the right direction! Don't waste your time going to quack fitness gurus and diet goddesses, spending your hard earned money trying to lose the weight you spent your hard earned money putting on! Give up fat! Give up dairy. Give up eggs, cheese, milk... Go on, you can do it! Make a positive shift for yourself. Don't listen to your addicted brain telling you you can never do it.

You don't need all that fat, especially the fat from the milk of another animal. Just think, the milk you drink is meant for the calf of the cow! You wouldn't give human breast milk to a calf would you? Why? Because mother's milk contains just the right amount of protein and vitamins to help the offspring grow and mature into a healthy animal. As every species is different, the quantities vary greatly, and if you hadn't noticed, you gave up drinking your mother's milk a long time ago.

Human breast milk – like animal milk – is there to provide the newborn with the right amount of nutrients when it is newly born! You would think it strange if they were selling bottles of human breast milk on the supermarket shelves, wouldn't you? Or what if everything you ate, or drank contained human breast milk? *You would find that strange wouldn't you?* And that is milk designed for our species! You are drinking the breast milk of another species, designed for newborns! And throughout our lives, we continue to drink it. Why? Because we are told it is good for us. “It contains calcium,” they say, but there are many products that are higher in calcium and more easily absorbed by the body.

It is just traditional in western countries to use dairy (cow breast milk) in everything we eat. We are used to having milk in our tea and coffee. We are used to having cream on our apple pie, because our mother put milk in our tea and cream on our pie. We don't need these products at all, but we have become addicted to them. If you want evidence we don't need them, just look to the asian diet which contains almost no dairy products, no cheese, no milk, and no butter.

So where do they get their calcium from? They seem healthy, you don't see fat people on the streets, surely they can't survive without their daily glass of milk as recommended by the government health agencies? In my opinion the promotion of dairy products has more to do with keeping the farmers in business than anything to do with our well being.

Our body systems are amazingly complex, honed over millions of years, with only the most successful traits carried on into future generations. How do you think it was possible that the human being has developed a need for the breast milk of another species? I don't know about you, but that seems laughable. Oh, if you want any other reasons to stop dairy products, then just imagine being hooked up to an automatic suction pump for three-quarters of the year and forced to lactate. That's a nice thought isn't it?

So what's the answer to this obvious problem of obesity that is scourging western nations? Give up dairy? Give up alcohol? Join a gym? Do more physical work? Maybe all the above, but one thing we haven't covered is why people *allow* themselves – which they do – to get fat. Well, no one forces us to eat; we physically lift the pizza, the soft drinks, the beer, and the cheese to our lips and swallow, so we do it to ourselves!

We eat and we eat until our waist lines start to bulge, our trousers become a little tighter, and our rear end starts protruding more. Soon, our face starts to look bloated, our arms and legs become fatter, and we start to sweat more. We find ourselves short of breath walking up a few stairs, all but the gentlest of exercise leaves us puffing and panting, and suddenly it's too late. We're so overweight that to think about cutting down on

fats wouldn't make any significant difference, and dieting would require going through physical and psychological pain, so we just accept it. We are fat.

Your self-esteem (*a feeling of pride in yourself*) diminishes and you just give up. You now have to buy fat people's clothes, join weight loss clubs, and watch tv programs where you'll learn that it's ok to be fat. It's not. It's not good for your system. Your heart and all your organs are designed to work with a lean body.

Imagine for a moment that you had a two litre family saloon. It has a chassis that is designed to work with that engine. If you started loading too much extra weight onto your car and then tried to tow more than the engine could manage, you would notice that your car really started to struggle. It wasn't built to carry that amount of extra weight, and neither is your body. Think about it. Feeling heavy and sluggish is not just a physical ailment either; the more weight you put on the more sluggish your mind becomes. It starts to become dull, it loses its vibrancy, sharpness, and inquisitiveness. It can only think about food now.

You may think these examples are extreme, but as western nations, we are becoming obese. We have to stop this trend in its tracks. Not through government initiatives and healthy eating adverts, but through ourselves. By using our minds.

But first, we have to accept we are addicted to eating. We don't just eat to survive, we live to eat; and big business has caught onto that fact. Before you start blaming them, they are just fulfilling a demand for fast, sweet, salty, fatty processed food.

We love all that stuff. Mmmmm, it just tastes sooo good. But this isn't your stomach telling you it tastes good, this is the pleasure centre of your brain telling you it wants more, more, more. Just like cocaine, heroin, cigarettes, and alcohol, this fatty, rich, processed food is satisfying a craving, and once the brain tastes these addictive substances, it remembers it likes them and motivates you to get more!

Ignore it. It isn't real. You don't really want these foods. They are not good for the system. The cravings are an illusion created by your brain. The more you abstain from these substances the less your brain will crave them. You are a wonderful, amazing animal, a human being – the most intelligent species on the planet; it's time to start living up to that label and start looking after ourselves before we become obese. A good start is to avoid any pre-packaged, processed food.

If it comes in a packet, you can be sure it has been processed to some extent. I know you're busy, but it's time to start buying the raw ingredients and remembering how to cook – and while you're at it, get rid of your microwave. Yes, I know it's convenient, and it allows you to reheat everybody's meals at different times, because you all come in at different times, and anyway you're too tired to cook, and it's quick, and you're hungry now; but if you are too tired to cook food, you should look at why you are too tired to cook!

You have to work longer and harder than ever before for your employer (who would get you to work 24 hours a day if they could) amongst other things. So, fast meals are actually a real plus for employers! It means they don't have to worry about you complaining that you have had to work overtime, because they know you can buy a ready meal and cook it in 0.087 seconds in a strange box that does weird things to your food!

Getting rid of the microwave will help you to think more about the food you buy and cook, as you won't just be able to slop it on a plate and heat it. You will have to take more time, and make more time, for cooking. You will start to look at the ingredients you are putting into the food. You will notice how much animal breast milk you are using in your human cooking. You will become more aware of the food you are putting into your mouth and swallowing.

You will become more aware of yourself. You will realise that what you consume reflects how you look externally, and it feels nice to look good. You can see the health in your skin and your eyes. Your self-image will be stronger. You will look good, feel good, and your mind will be clearer. It's amazing that you can get all these positive benefits by just choosing to eat non-processed, non-packaged food. You will want to live a more healthy lifestyle. You won't want to fill your body up with toxins any more. It feels good to be alive!

You will take more pleasure in nature, you will walk more because you feel good and strong. Your brain will start to lose its addictions. All because you started to think what you were putting into your mouth.

It all starts with food. Every other change you make is purely external. There's no good exercising four times a week if you stuff your face with processed food. Exercise is important, but only if you eat well first. It's not the only answer. You may do a physical job for a living, but eating processed food is just filling your body up with toxins.

Some of you might not care that you eat processed foods. You might not care that you are overweight.

You might not care that you drink animal baby milk, but then that is symptomatic of the whole of western society, so you are not alone! It's ok not to care. No one is forcing you to, but all I hope is that you will start to think a little bit about what you are doing to your magnificent body system – a system so advanced, that Man, with all his intelligence could never hope to replicate it. A system you stuff with burgers, pies, beer, wine, drugs, and animal fats.

In fact, the only reason we aren't completely toxic is because our system is so advanced. Think about it. You don't care what you put in to your body – because it manages to expel most of the toxins you ingest – until you get sick. It seems the only time we gain real awareness of what we are doing to ourselves is when we end up in hospital.

Someone I know recently had a quadruple heart bypass, which was preceded by a heart attack, preceded by ten years of angina. He ate too much fatty food, drank too much alcohol, and finally his body gave up. Fortunately the wonders of modern medicine managed to save him. Now he is a changed man. He doesn't drink. He has become vegetarian, doesn't eat any animal fats (dairy/eggs), and is determined to lead a healthy lifestyle from now on! All it took for him to get this awareness was that he nearly died! Isn't it a pity that it takes such drastic events to convince us, the most intelligent species on the planet, to do something good for our system?

So you may not care now, but this unhealthy living is destroying our systems. For what? The psychological pleasure of eating a cheeseburger, a cake, a toasted cheese sandwich, or drinking a pint of beer? So for all of you who don't care out there, just notice how you feel when you eat processed foods and creamy sauces, and compare it to how you feel when you eat a piece of steamed broccoli! "Ugh, plain broccoli, that's so boring," I hear you say. And that is precisely the difference between the two foods. One is "boring" the other is "really tasty." Why do you think that is?

Do you think the stomach thinks that the broccoli, which is full of vitamins the system needs, is boring, or do you think the real reason you find plain steamed broccoli "boring," is because it doesn't contain the addictive chemicals which work on the pleasure centres of your brain? Cheeseburger or steamed vegetables? Sweet fatty sauce, versus healthy vegetables?

On the surface it's no competition, is it? Anyone who was intelligent would pick the healthy option. But we don't, do we? We buy the one brain is most addicted to. Start to notice it...What have you got to lose? The only losers will be the companies that make billions of dollars keeping us addicted to their processed junk, and that can't be a bad thing, can it?

[Back to Index](#)

Expectations

1. *Belief about (or mental picture of) the future*
2. *Wishing with confidence of fulfilment*
3. *The feeling that something is about to happen*

I don't know about you, but I often think I must have been a great disappointment to my parents – my father in particular. I think he had great hopes for me, and expected me to follow in his footsteps into business. But I didn't. Instead, I left school early without a proper qualification to my name, proceeded to undertake a series of dead end jobs, and inevitably kept borrowing money from him just so I could "stay afloat."

I think he thought that because he came from a disadvantaged background, grew up during the second world war, and "made it" on his own, that I couldn't fail to have a promising career ahead of me, given the chances I was getting (private school, plenty of money, extra coaching when I needed it). I would be great.

He probably thought I would be a businessman like him, only I would be greater. I would be a captain of industry; I would have thousands of people working for me; I would live in a big house with my pretty wife, and he could pop round and visit the grandchildren any time he wanted. What a disappointment I must have been to him! In and out of work all the time, never holding down a steady job, always off travelling somewhere with no money. In his eyes I must have failed. Well, failed him and his expectations at least. He now has high expectations for my book; he hopes I get it published, and that I become a successful author, but of course that's not what this book is about.

So why do parents have such high expectations of us? Why do they put so much pressure on us to do well at school? Are they just looking out for us? Do they just want us to be successful so we don't have to struggle through life, like they had to? That is what we are here to find out.

I have often wished that I had asked my father why he had such high expectations of me, and I wonder whether fathers who have not become successful, also have high expectations for their children, or are they just happy to let them be? I often wonder whether it is their own status they are worrying about, (sorry for the cynicism) that deep in their mind they feel like they would lose status in the eyes of their peers, if they are successful and their children are not. How do you think my father would react when he was asked:

"So what's young alan up to now?"

What would he say?

"Erm, Erm, well he's kind of in between jobs now," when actually what he really wanted to say was, "Well, actually, he's lazy and ungrateful; he does nothing, and after all we did for him. He's such a disappointment to me."

But it's not just successful parents who place these expectations on their children. Poor and uneducated families believe that the children will pull them out of the misery and poverty they find themselves in. "Oh, yes, our george. He's a lawyer now you know; very successful..."

But what happens to the young mind when faced with the knowledge that he is not going to live up to these expectations? I knew I was never going to be a rocket scientist or win the nobel prize for physics, and I didn't like school much.

I couldn't really see the point of all the tests they kept making us do; probably because I wasn't any good at them. I couldn't tell my parents that; they were investing in my future (and spending lots of their hard earned cash on me) so I had to keep going. The problem was, everyone now had high expectations of me. Even my friends thought I was going to be successful – imagine their surprise when I dropped out of school!

I then did what any soon to be unsuccessful person does, I started hanging around with people who were not only less intelligent than I was, but who had no expectations of me – the hard drinking pub crowd. It was great. Suddenly I was free. No one had any expectations, except I would be able to drink at least eight pints each night with them. To them, I sounded intelligent and well spoken, and they kept asking me "What are you going to do alan? I'm sure you're going to make a lot of money, not like us, we're stuck in our jobs."

And there it was. It had happened again; suddenly, even the "drop out" crowd I was hanging around with wanted me to make something of my life. So I did what any self-respecting drop out would do, I started hanging round with a new drop out crowd.

Years went by, and I still wasn't living up to anyone's expectations, least of all my own. You see, the more people told me I was going to be a success, the more I started believing it myself, and the more bitterly disappointed I became when I failed, yet again.

Disappointment

1. *A feeling of dissatisfaction that results when your expectations are not realised*
2. *An act (or failure to act) that disappoints someone*

I couldn't believe it! Everything I tried, I failed at. When I first started a new job, I went into it like a rocket and was soon the golden boy. Everyone had high expectations! But time after time, I blew it; by arguing with the bosses, or turning up late. The truth is, I didn't care.

I was a disappointment to my parents, my friends and everyone I met. I became depressed, wondering how I was going to find a way out of this cycle of expectation and disappointment?

Suddenly I knew; I needed to be my own boss. So I left my job – which was only temporary – and set out to start a computer company. I was pretty good at computers and I thought, "I'm going to make a success of this!"

It started well enough, and everyone had high expectations that this was the chance I needed to really prove myself. This was where I would become the success that everyone expected me to become; alas it was not to be. Within two months, I had run out of money. I couldn't borrow anything from the banks, as by now I had a bad credit rating, and the only way I could get the money I needed, was to go crawling back to my father once again and borrow the money from him, but each time I did, I had to endure a lecture about what a disappointment I was...

"You're useless, alan," he would say (as he had said for most of my life by the way), "you can never get anything right, you really are a good for nothing."

"Yes dad."

"Do you know how much money you've cost me over the years with your silly schemes? Thousands. I don't know why you don't just buckle down and get on!"

"Neither do I dad."

And he went on:

"Do you know what people would give to have had your chances in life? Hmm? Well, Do you?"

"No dad."

"Let's just say that there is a queue of people out there who would give anything to have a tenth of what you were given."

"Yes dad."

"I'm sick of supporting you, I'm sick of you coming with your hand out all the time, it's time to grow up, for christ's sake!"

"Yes dad."

"Now, how much do you need?"

And that was the story of my own business, which as you will imagine, failed several months later. Needless to say, I ended up down the pub with a new group of friends, who had no expectations of me, except being able to drink eight pints. It was definitely a darn sight easier than trying to live up to my dad's expectations.

Failure

1. *An act that fails*
2. *An event that does not accomplish its intended purpose*
3. *Lack of success*
4. *A person with a record of failing; someone who loses consistently*

So there I was, branded a failure; and that lived with me for most of my adult life, until recently, when I started to consider it more deeply. I realised that I wasn't a failure myself, I was failing to live up to expectations. These weren't my expectations of myself, these were somebody else's: My parents! That's it, I thought, "All these years you thought you were a failure, and there was no one to blame but the expectations!"

Think about it. If you are a low grade student in biology, and I expect you to become a surgeon, what do you think the chances are of it happening? Zero to ten percent? Now it would be different if you set yourself a goal that said I am going to become a surgeon, but then you would study harder at biology at school. You'd have to be slightly silly to fail all your exams and still want to be a surgeon, that wouldn't make any sense.

It was the same with me. My dad wanted me to become a captain of industry or at least an entrepreneur, but he was so blinded by his expectations, he failed to notice reality. Instead of encouraging me to do something a little closer to the standard of work I was putting out, he said "reach for the stars!" And as I didn't want to become a captain of industry, I didn't put any effort in, so had no chance of even leaving the earth's atmosphere, let alone reaching the stars.

After I left school, I kept trying to please him by taking jobs I thought would impress him, but I wasn't doing them for me, I was doing them for him; so when my enthusiasm waned several months into the job, I ended up doing something to get myself fired or just walking out.

But my dad wasn't to blame, all he did was encourage me; it was the expectations and the gap between them and reality. I have never been a failure. If I really want to do something, I do it, and if I don't, or don't succeed at it, it doesn't make me a failure (although people would see it like that). But who cares about other people? Unfortunately, we do, and we end up trying to please everybody, even if it makes us unhappy ourselves. So we try and try until we give up, or can't go on, and we are branded failures. Thanks very much!

So, instead of creating expectations, maybe parents should just let their children be. Let them be children, let them grow up, and when they want to do something they will do it. After all, it's their life, not yours. What's it got to do with you if they don't want to be a scientist or a businessman? Those are the things you wanted to be, not what your children want to be; so leave them alone! Let them work out their way in the world. All you are doing is setting yourself and your children up for potential disappointment later on in life, and then have them branded as failures.

Success is overrated anyway. As long as people are happy and content in their life, free from conflict and fear they will have a good life. It is not up to you to choose their path for them. "But I am only trying to guide them as any good parent would do" I hear one parent shout. But putting pressure on children to decide what they want to be when they finish school is about as far away from being a good parent as anyone could hope to be. Let them BE.

Who cares if they end up working in a dead end job? That is only your view. If the child chooses it, then let him be. There is work to be done and people have to do it. We must not judge our children for the jobs or the path they have chosen. There is no right and wrong path, only a path; we must see that even if we don't agree with their choices. We must end the cycle of expectations, disappointment and failure we are creating for our children and ourselves.

Who needs expectations? They are merely an expression of psychological becoming, which is a process of thought: Of wanting more than you already are, which in the end, causes conflict and unhappiness for all involved. Let's all give up expecting, and we may find ourselves pleasantly surprised by the results. And even if we aren't, well, it's not the most important thing in the world, is it? Let it go. Please. We are doing so much damage to our children's young minds.

And to young people, I say: If anyone asks you what you want to be when you grow up, you can reply cleverly: "But, I already am!" And then watch their response. Have fun in life, and never let anyone tell you you are a disappointment or a failure, you were already so much more than that the day you were born.

[Back to Index](#)

Experience

1. *The accumulation of knowledge or skill that results from direct participation in events or activities*
2. *The content of direct observation or participation in an event*
3. *An event as apprehended*
4. *Go or live through*
5. *Undergo an emotional sensation*
6. *Have first-hand knowledge of states, situations, emotions, or sensations*

No matter what your education, one always finds it remarkably difficult to get a job without having the necessary experience. In other words, you may know how to do the job in theory, but we want to see evidence you can do it in the real world. We want to know you have lived the job, gone through the good days and the bad, and still managed to get the work done. Of course, experience is not just about work. I see life as a collection of experiences, neither good nor bad – not judged, just lived.

I have tried to experience as much as I could in life. You may consider some things I have experienced good, others bad, but they have been experienced, and now they are in the past. The only thing I can say is that I have learned from this experience. I don't say I've learned from my mistakes, I prefer to call them my choices.

Long ago I decided to stop beating myself up about choices that didn't work out the way I planned. They were my choices. They were right at the time, otherwise I would not have made them. Whether I judge them to be errors in the future is just hindsight. It doesn't change the event.

Job application for life: My experience

Let me take you back to my youth. Here I am about fourteen years old: I am on the bus on the way to school. I have just been notified by letter that my dad has decided he can't live with my mum anymore (and that means me also). I know plenty of people's parents have split up, but just reflect, if you can, on a young boy in puberty whose father, that he loves and respects, has just abandoned him. Why has he left? What did I do wrong? Why would he leave me if he loved me?

It is an experience I would not wish anyone to go through. The constant sobbing from my mother, sitting in darkness, drinking sherry and listening to mournful music. "Surely no man is worth that?" I thought. "Why would you put yourself through so much torture for so many years after he left?" Obviously because she was in love.

I don't know how the whole trauma ended up hurting me emotionally and psychologically. I still had a comfortable life, and we weren't short of money, although something was always missing. I even missed being shouted at, and although my father was never around to play with during my childhood (working to further his career), he was still there. Now he had written to say he was off. He couldn't live here any more. He wouldn't be back.

I'm sure many people will have had similar experiences.

I can't really remember that time too well. Maybe I have blanked it out, maybe it was just a long time ago (24 years ago), so I won't say it turned me into an emotional wreck; I am not sure how it affected me. I lived through it, and although it probably ended up affecting my school work, I could never be sure if the reason I failed to live up to expectations was due to emotional trauma, or just because I was a daydreamer and lazy!

I left school at the age of eighteen without completing my "A" levels. I was sent out to work, but I didn't really want to work. I couldn't be bothered! I had discovered alcohol, cigarettes, and girls. The problem was that I didn't have any money, so I went through my mum's drawers looking for loose change. I got an overdraft on my bank account and took out a loan (none of which I had the means to pay back). I don't know how it happened or what I was thinking. I even altered cheques that my dad gave me to make it more. I was just crashing through life without any thought or awareness.

I took a job that my mum had arranged for me, but it didn't pay much. My new friends were older than me and had more money to go out with. I had to beg, borrow, and steal to keep up with them. I didn't realise it at the time, but all this was, was peer pressure. If I could have learned to say "No I'm not going out tonight," or "I have no money," I wouldn't have got myself into these situations. The benefit of hindsight rather than foresight!

These older boys appealed to my ego. They were cool. They had cars, their own flats, fashionable clothes, plenty of girlfriends, and they wanted me to be their friend. Wow. To be accepted into a cool group! It was more than any young man could ask for. The only thing I needed was a car, and money – my parents provided both.

I left my job after about six months in search of new riches. I took a job as a self-employed telesales representative selling advertising space. By this time, I was in debt, and my parents had sold my car (while I

was away on a holiday I couldn't afford).

I convinced my dad to rent me a car for the job. I picked up parking tickets galore, I made no money, and I got more and more into debt as I tried to earn enough to go out and be cool with the lads.

I left job after job, after arguing with the bosses, always thinking I was right and they were wrong. Getting fired again and again.

I was basically an angry young man between eighteen and twenty one. I got drunk all the time, had casual sex with as many girls as was physically possible, and worked very little. I got involved in several public fracas with the police, and ended in jail for the night; appearing several times at the local magistrate's court.

But I was brought up well. I went to private school, spoke with a nice accent, and was genuinely kind to people, so no one could really understand what was going on. Maybe it was trauma and rage, maybe just my age.

I wanted to become a musician, although the only instruments I played with any competency were the recorder and the flute, which are not well known in pop music! I made a friend at a sales job, who was a budding musician – although he was 44 – and I decided that if he could do it, so could I. I purchased electronic equipment, and off I went.

I had no idea of how to construct a song, although I did record several dance tracks. I blamed the sound engineer for their quality, although in reality, they were dire because I couldn't play any of the instruments I owned, and although I had a "good ear" for music, had actually omitted to write the songs before going into record them!

The climax of this sorry state of affairs happened on Christmas day in 1989 where, fuelled with alcohol, and without a penny to go out in the evening, I snapped.

I smashed my guitar up and set fire to my parents' bed, my bed, and my dad's chair. Looking back, I cannot see what the significance of the three items were, but I immediately went next door to our neighbour's house to get them to call the fire brigade. Unfortunately, I hadn't counted on the police being called, and was duly arrested for arson, which I strenuously denied (even though the evidence was overwhelming).

I wasn't charged as no one was in the house, and they left it up to the parents to decide whether to prosecute or not. Fortunately, they didn't.

I was sent to see a psychiatrist, who promptly told my parents I was an alcoholic, and as far as I can remember, that was the end of the therapy.

My parents didn't know what to do with me, but eventually I was sent to Newcastle (five hours away from my parents) to retake my exams. I was in a shared house, my parents had bought me a new car, and I got an allowance every week. I found a girlfriend. I went out partying. It was great fun! I can't remember the college much, only that I failed my exams because I wasn't concentrating or interested in the work.

My father despaired and tried to help me get a job, but I wasn't interested. Eventually I was sent to help on a project that was based in Paris with one of the companies he ran. That was a real turning point for me. In many ways.

I started to enjoy work. I got to travel. People were interested in me. I had a nice apartment that I paid for myself. I was eventually starting to learn to be more responsible. I was getting on fine; I had the chance to stay and work permanently and make a life for myself there, and had even made plans to move to a bigger apartment. I took out a loan to pay for new furniture; but shortly before moving, I went on a business trip to Stockholm, in Sweden. That business trip signalled the end of my life in Paris, and the start of a very different life.

**

I had noticed over the previous months that I was beginning to become nervous about flying. I started feeling panicky as soon as the engines started, I worried that the flaps were in the wrong place to take off, that the engine was making the wrong kind of sound, or that the airline I was flying didn't have a good safety record; that, actually, I was about two minutes away from death. The year was 1993.

Although I was fairly lonely living in a country with no close friends, and living amongst a culture that didn't pop down to the pub on a Friday night, I was quite content. I went out shopping every Saturday and treated myself to something new. I was still trying to make it in the music business, even though all of my tracks were unfinished, or unstarted, due to not being able to play the guitar or piano, so I just messed around

with the drum machine. Nevertheless, it made me superficially happy at least.

I was given a return ticket back to the uk once a month where I still had a girlfriend, and used it as a good opportunity to get drunk with the lads. I had told my girlfriend it wasn't going to work, and we should split up, but she was insistent on staying together whilst I was abroad. I remained faithful the entire time I was away, although this was to change later.

My life changed the day I caught the plane to stockholm.

As usual, I had felt a bit uneasy on the flight, but by the time I arrived at the hotel in sweden I was feeling very strange. I went to bed early, but as soon as I got into bed, my head felt like it was going to explode, spinning out of control, I felt sick, I went to the bathroom to throw up, I felt like the world was closing in on me. I went to the window to get some air, but it wouldn't open. What was happening to me? I had never felt like this in my life. I was definitely going crazy. I can't remember how long it lasted, but it felt like an eternity.

I woke the next morning feeling like I was on a different planet. I couldn't eat at breakfast. I was picked up and taken to the office where I sat staring at the wall for several hours. I then told them I was feeling ill and needed to go home – not to paris, to london, where my family home was. I desperately wanted to go home, to run away from whatever was happening to me, and although I was scared about going on a plane, the risk was worth it. I had to get away.

And so started a cycle of events that would lead to me running away whenever I started to feel anxious or panicked.

I didn't know why I was running; I just knew that if I got home to my family house everything would be ok.

Several days after the panic attack, I returned to paris. It was tuesday. I told them, that unfortunately, I had to leave, and I would be leaving the next day.

No one could understand it. Here was this amiable, confident young man who was good at his job, liked living in one of the world's best cities, about to accept a permanent job, and move to a bigger apartment, telling them he would be leaving the next day. To them, and to me, it seemed crazy, but it was something I had to do.

I packed my car and drove back to england, taking what I could with me. The next day I got an appointment to see the doctor, who promptly told me to "pull yourself together." Great advice! But unfortunately, this left me struggling to stop having panic attacks all the time, and too afraid to ask anyone for any help due to embarrassment, including my parents, and my girlfriend.

I plummeted into despair, although I covered it well.

I went out drinking more and more to stop the anxiety and the thoughts, under the pretext of having fun. I couldn't sleep without the tv on. I became involved with lots of people on one night stands, and I tried drugs (speed) for the first time. I was a mess, but I was keeping it all together under my "happy go lucky" positive persona. I was so upbeat and happy all the time; how could anyone understand that underneath I was desperately afraid (but not unhappy).

This cycle of panic (overcome with alcohol) lasted until 1997, when I finally split up with my long suffering girlfriend.

I was still in and out of jobs, although, through a good deal of bullshitting, had managed to work my way up fairly quickly. I was arrogant, and was convinced I could do a job better than anyone else. Still the panic attacks came.

In 1998 the panic attacks seemed to subside. I had a new girlfriend who brought a lot of stability into my life. She wanted to be a home maker and have children, and although I wasn't interested in that kind of life, she was nice to be around. Bubbly and cheerful.

We got a dog together, a house by the sea and a horse. I was by now earning huge money as a contractor in information technology, and life seemed rosy. For the first time in my life things started to come together – until she got pregnant. I thought she had done it deliberately and was very angry. I told her it was me or the baby, and being the type of girl to put me first over a living being inside her, she decided to have an abortion. I didn't really think how this was affecting her, I was only thinking about my own selfish needs.

Soon after the abortion, I decided to give it all up. I was wasting every penny I earned on holidays and fun.

I had a speedboat and I bought a Jeep 4x4; I went out partying to posh london clubs with my – also

extremely well paid – colleagues. I was living the real high life now!

Except, it suddenly dawned on me one day that this was about the most amount of money I was going to get paid. I certainly wasn't worth what they were paying me. I hadn't saved a penny. I didn't own any property, so where else could I go? I gave up work and went travelling to australia.

Again, no one could understand why I was leaving when surely I was at the highest point in my career. But they didn't get it. I was 29, at the highest point in my career, and the only way for me as I saw it, was down.

I had never stuck at anything my whole life. My life was a series of starts and stops. Comings and goings. I didn't want a boring permanent job, I liked the excitement of travelling and change. It fitted in with my personality. Always flitting between jobs, relationships, towns, countries. Always on the move.

My girlfriend and I didn't stay together long once we went travelling. I couldn't stand her, and dumped her at the soonest possible moment; in a campsite miles from anywhere! I just packed up my rucksack, told her I was leaving, and that was the last I ever saw of her. Within an hour of leaving her, the people I was travelling with picked up another hitch-hiker whom I ended up having a month long relationship with. We travelled back to the hostel my previous girlfriend and I had been working, where I had spent the time getting drunk, having sex with other guests, partying, and going for swims in the pool at 5.00 am (before driving their courtesy bus at 6.00 am), and everyone was indeed surprised as it was only a month since I had left with someone else!

Not surprised at all, was a girl who worked in reception. She had become friendly with my ex during our stay there, taking an instant dislike to me, having advised my ex to leave me as soon as possible. We were married three years later.

I don't know how it happened, but we found a lot in common with each other, and just decided to go travelling on a bus into the sunset. It was two days before our first kiss. From that day onward things started to go right, although I was still drinking a lot, and socialising with the wrong types of people. But I guess you hang around with people who like doing similar things.

This girl was different to all the others I had known. She started opening my eyes to several things I was unaware of. She taught me you don't need to get drunk to have a good time, and cigarette butts take one hundred years to break down (as I casually flicked the butt onto a sydney street);

I started to become more aware of myself and my environment. I opened up to her, told her about my problems and she listened patiently. It was true love. I loved her with every part of my being. I couldn't bear to be without her. I missed her when she wasn't there.

We spent the next five years travelling, living, eating, studying, sleeping, working, and making love, learned to be chefs, and studied to become traditional thai massage therapists. We were together almost 24/7, 365. No one could work out how we managed to do it, but we did.

I had some therapy to deal with the anxiety, and for a while it got better.

But as time went on, I began to get the feelings of needing to run away again. I didn't want to, but I just couldn't stop myself. Just like years earlier, I got on a plane several times from australia back to my family home in england.

I started going out to the pub nearly every day again. People offered me party drugs which I, being drunk, casually accepted. It made me feel a lot worse the next morning, and I always regretted it, but suddenly I was back fifteen years ago, except now I had developed a heightened awareness of my actions; and although didn't stop myself from doing it, always regretted it.

I wanted to be a better person, but kept being dragged (willingly) into something I didn't want. It all came to an end last year when I left australia, and my wife. She just couldn't live with me any more (unsurprisingly).

For the last year and a half I have been finishing this book, developing more awareness, and being more thoughtful. Since returning to europe, I have worked as a chef in ireland and had a short relationship in the czech republic whilst writing my book there. I have decided to develop my own personal skills before entering into any more relationships! I write this book on an island in scotland. At a tibetan buddhist retreat in fact. This is my experience so far...

I could go on and on, or into much more detail than I have here, but you get the picture. Some of you may

have been shocked by what you read here. Some of you may be thinking:

“How can such a deeply flawed individual give me advice on living my life? He should sort out his own life first!”

But all I have done is bared my experience to you. If it was good or bad is merely subjective. Just because I have done things that may be illegal, doesn't mean they were bad. It is only experience. It was my life as I lived it.

I have told you as much as I can, without deceit, in order to let you the reader become involved in my life, which is my experience. Without judgement. It just is. That is how I have interacted with the world for the last 38 years.

There has been fear, hate, selfishness, anxiety, greed, lies, cheating, intoxication, anger, and waste; but also a lot of love, fun and joy, in case you think my life has been one of misery! These have just been the most significant events of the last twenty one years. I have not been miserable in my life. I have embraced each day with enthusiasm and a smile.

So what can we learn from experience? What is it that makes experience so important? For me, it is, learning from each action we perform, and using that knowledge to improve our awareness of ourselves in action. I spent many years in the dark, unaware of the effect my actions were having: first on my family, and loved ones, and second, on the wider community who have had to work with me, and deal with me. I just carried on regardless, even when people were shocked by my actions or tried to help me.

It is only now I have almost complete awareness of myself in action that I can start to comprehend the pain I put everyone through, and although self-criticism is not helpful in the long run, the awareness that you have had a negative effect on yourself and others is.

So let's not worry about going into the past and seeing where we could have improved, that is a waste of time, time which is ticking away, even as we speak. You and I have just lived. The way *we* chose to.

I could have got help years earlier, but I didn't. I was too busy to worry about that. If I was to look back on the times I felt at my lowest, I would say “I wish I had got help way back,” but what good would it do me?

I don't know what kind of experience you have had. You may have led a blameless life, sacrificing yourself before others, or you may have been a paedophile, a murderer, a tyrant, or a bully. You may have been jealous, greedy, or selfish, but all that is in the past. As you read this, the last word you read is in the past.

We may think we have learned from our actions in the past, and we know that if you get drunk, you will feel terrible the next day, or if I rob a bank, I am likely to get caught; but how many people repeat these actions?

Maybe, like most people, you never learn, because experience doesn't teach you awareness. Awareness teaches you awareness, and awareness is the one thing that will help us progress in our lives. Most people who have experienced drugs do not become aware that destroying your mind with chemicals is a bad thing; in fact they will probably keep doing it because it feels good. Most people who lose money on a horse will not realise the futility of gambling, and will put money on another horse to win their money back. Please go into this with me here. This is most important.

Just because you have experienced something doesn't mean you will become aware of what you are doing, unless it has a negative effect. And even then, most people repeat the same mistakes over and over, chiding themselves “Why do I keep making the same mistakes over and over!”

Surely they have the experience. Surely they would learn?

We would all agree that experience is essential to performing repetitive tasks like driving, operating machinery, or working in the same job. You have a limited set of instructions, and by repeating them, you hone your skills. That is why experience is necessary for jobs. They want you to have honed your skills before they start paying you a wage! Otherwise experience is worthless.

It can only be of value if you gain instant awareness from your action.

“I have hit my child for crying. I am now aware that hitting my child causes suffering and lacks compassion. I will never be violent again.”

Unfortunately the chances of that happening are slim, although you never know.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

So, before we leave this topic, let us make an agreement, you and I, to draw a line under experience, to note what we have done in up to this moment, and to never judge ourselves for what we have done in the past, nor let others judge us. Let us agree to develop awareness of ourselves, to notice how we interact with society, and start afresh this second with compassion for all other beings on this planet. Forget what experience has taught you. Experience is memory, and memory is conditioning.

Whether you have had bad experiences of people from different nationalities, religions, or certain personalities, approach all with a new found openness. It isn't hard. Just let go of experience. Let go of what you think you know. Don't judge based on past experience. You are just remembering a pattern.

Real life isn't a stored pattern. It's new and vibrant every time you look at it. Give it a chance before you destroy all your new experiences with "experience."

[Back to Index](#)

Explore

1. *Inquire into*
2. *Travel to or penetrate into*
3. *Examine minutely*

All hail Man, the great explorer

Come on, we have to give ourselves a round of applause to start this topic off. We have explored more than any other species on the planet. We have explored the depths of the oceans and discovered wonderful new creatures. We have explored into the earth's crust and found wonderful minerals, we have explored the skies and created amazing aircraft to carry us many meters above the land, and finally we have started to explore space and have created satellites and spaces stations. Oh yeah, and some bloke went to the north pole and another to the south, and one guy went up a tall mountain. The end.

Maybe it's just me, but it seems that all the exploration that Man has done, save for a few expeditions over the arctic tundra and up some exceptionally high mountains, has been to benefit himself; for his own wealth. He didn't just mine the rock to see what it was made from; he mined it because it made him wealthy. I can hear some of you thinking out loud already:

"What nonsense is this?" If it hadn't been for all Man's exploring we wouldn't be where we are today," to which I reply:

"Exactly!"

Others will be saying:

"But look at our achievements! We have done so much. No other species has come close to what we have done," to which I reply:

"Exactly!"

Thanks to our wonderfully big brains and our insatiable desire to explore everything, we have, whether we like it or not, made a bit of a mess of this planet of ours, and the governments with space programs will probably do the same with outer space given half a chance. We just can't stop exploring can we? But soon, there will be nowhere left to go. All will have been discovered, all will have been mined, trawled, and polluted, then we will only be able to sit back and explore with our big brains where it all went wrong.

Perhaps then we should start with the mind before we destroy everything, because that is where it all begins. When we have been exploring it has always been external. Of course, we have thought about the exploration in our minds first, but we have always looked outward. We have always explored with our eyes and our hands. We have built sailing ships and traversed the globe, but we have never once thought to mount an expedition to the interior, which would surely be a more fascinating journey than ever before. That all been said. Let us begin.

A journey to the centre

"But where do we begin? Is there a starting point? And anyway what is the point of all this?" I hear some of you asking. Perhaps there is a starting point. Perhaps there is a point to it all, but we will never know until we look. So where is the centre of your mind? Is it the bit between the left and right hemispheres of the brain? If you think, then what side does it come from? Is the thought above you, to the left a bit, or maybe panned to the extreme right? Any ideas? Perhaps you can hear your voice as you read this. Where is this thought coming from?" Did you hear it? "Why am I talking in my own head?" "Why can I hear my voice, but my lips aren't moving?" Ok, you get the idea!

If you ever get to see a brain, it looks kind of greyish with lots of bumps all over it. It certainly doesn't look like the kind of thing that allows a man to explore space or his sexuality, does it? In fact it looks just like any other organ in the body (pretty disgusting), and although there are massive electrical pulses along the neural network that is your mind, you can't see them to the naked eye. I won't start using technical terms here, as I'm afraid I don't know any; so if you want more detail, you'll have to head down to your local library!

So our brain is a bit of an enigma. You can't really see it in action unless you look at another human or study yourself, but if you watch a man chatting up a girl in a bar you can see that his brain is definitely hard at work. But these thoughts trouble me. I can hear them in my own voice but they do not appear to be coming from anywhere. A true mystery! Are thoughts real then? Do they really exist? Can anyone else hear them, or are they locked inside my cranium (*the part of the skull that encloses the brain*)?

Perhaps this is the reason that man explores outwardly. Perhaps it is a little too complex to understand something if you can't actually see it working. If I look in the mirror, I can see my face moving, I can see that I can move my mouth, and if I look down I can see that I can move my hands and that I am still alive, but there is no way to really see inside our own brains.

Sure, the scientists have concocted clever little machines that measure electrical impulses – amongst other things – but they can't visually map the territory. Unlike the science fiction films where observers are able to see into people's minds by way of a television screen and some special cables, our observations at a scientific level are should we say, slightly lacking! So how do we map the brain? How do we see what is going on in there? Unfortunately we only have one way available at the moment and that is to turn inward on ourselves, like pointing a video camera at a television screen.

As we try to watch for our thoughts, they become elusive, jumping around, so we can never really catch them, or hold them for long enough to see what they contain. Some people recommend meditation for this process where (through chanting or some other method) they are able to empty their mind long enough so they can see what's going on. By all accounts, it's a difficult and long process, and doesn't ever really answer all our questions. So where are we?

We have said we aren't sure where our thoughts are coming from, we couldn't draw them if we wanted to, we don't know what colour they are, we can only say we know they exist. Try as we may to get an image in our mind it's never quite as clear as watching it on a tv screen, unless, that is, we are asleep.

Dreaming

1. A series of mental images and emotions occurring during sleep

Let's face it, dreaming has been explored more than most other functions of the brain and psychologists can tell us one thing, and neurologists can tell us another, but when most of us want to know something, we go straight to a dream dictionary where we find out that dying in a dream doesn't mean you're going to die in real life; and if you see a rat in your dream then that means someone is going to die in real life or something like that!

Unfortunately, as no one really knows what's going on in the brain, we have to assume that these dream dictionaries are of no more use to us than the daily horoscopes in the tabloid newspapers; all they are based on, is human superstition and not much insight. Nonetheless, they sell in their millions, to people desperate to know what their dreams mean; because of course, as an explorer, Man can never live with the unknown – he must find out the truth, even if the real truth is far removed from what the writers have decided it means.

But we shouldn't knock dreams. If nothing else, they are great television you don't have to stay awake for to watch, and man, are some of them weird!

I'm sure you have all had similar experiences with your dreams, as characters and shapes interchange, and speak in different voices. One minute we are in a bar talking, the next we are rolling down a hill as a rock. One second we are in a hotel lobby the next we are in a field! Argh! What does it all mean? The scientists have said that we dream to make sense of the day and file everything away in order, but unless we dream in metaphors I can't remember having been a rock on hill!

"Ahh so the rock signifies me, because I feel heavy and because I have a great "weight" on my mind, and I am laden down with debt and I feel like my life is running out of control!"

Thanks psychologists and dream dictionaries, but I think I'll take my chances elsewhere!

One vivid recurring dream I have is that I am flying. Yeah I know you've all had dreams about flying, but what does it all mean? Sure, I am a little bit scared of flying, which, given that I am sitting in a metal tube filled with 200 tons of highly explosive jet fuel gives me some cause to be.

But these dreams are not about being in an aircraft. I am actually flying. In some of the dreams I am standing on a chair and I raise my hands and let myself fall. Suddenly I am free. I am floating about the earth! It is a wonderful experience.

Some people may counsel me that actually in the past man has always flown but his nature has held him to the ground (sorry, isn't that gravity?) and only when he lets go of all earthly desire will he be true to fly again. Hmm, perhaps I have just watched done too many superman films.

But although I can't see we were ever flyers on this planet, we could have been in a different life, or maybe we are experiencing what our other self is experiencing in a different dimension! But would that mean he had the same friends as me and went to the same bars, except he didn't have to take a taxi! Whoa! This is all getting a bit too weird man, so I think we better anchor ourselves firmly back to this planet and back to "reality" and ask one of the characters in our dreams what it's all about.

Yesterday I had a vivid dream of my wife, whom I separated from two years ago, and haven't seen since; so maybe I should ask her what the heck I'm doing dreaming about her after all this time, seeing as the brain is supposed to be making sense of the day's events. I will ask. But first I have to go to sleep. See you in my dreams!

Asking the dream

Me: Ah ha! Caught you!

Her: What are you doing in your own dream?

Me: I've come to ask you a question or two.

Her: What about?

Me: Well, I think it's kind of weird that I am dreaming about you a lot at the moment, seeing as we split up ages ago.

Her: What do you dream of me?

Me: I don't know, sometimes we are kissing, sometimes we are holding hands. Once we cried together.

Her: Perhaps you dream of me because you still want to ask me something?

Me: Do I? Perhaps I do. I was pretty sad at leaving and all.

Her: I know you were.

Me: Do you miss me?

Her: What sort of a question is that? I loved you once. But now it is gone.

Me: But I still love you, I think. I think that's why I dream about you all the time.

Her: But you left ME. Remember?

Me: That's true, but if only we could get back together again. I could make it right.

Her: It is right. What's done is done.

Me: But why do I kiss you in my dreams, when I have a real girlfriend lying in bed next to me. Is that cheating?

Her: It cannot be cheating because I do not exist. You kiss me, because you have kissed me before. You remember kissing me.

Me: But doesn't this mean we will get back together again?

Her: Why would we? We have been apart for such a long time. It is over.

Me: So why do I dream of you?

Her: Because you remember me, and in your memory you have good memories and bad. You dream of me as you once knew me.

Me: But aren't you still the same?

Her: In the dream I am, because your memory last saw me in the flesh like that. But now I am just a figment of your imagination.

Me: My imagination?

Her: Your dream of me is a connection of memories all jumbled around, and left to fight it out in your imagination.

Me: But is my imagination real? Does it exist? Where is it?

Her: It is in your mind and without. It is part of the whole.

Me: You mean, my dreams are just imagination?

Her: What else? Do you think you really kissed me last night? Do you think I dreamed of kissing you?

Me: Did you?

Her: You will never know, because that is only in my imagination.

Me: So it's over between us?

Her: I guess so. But if you want to, you can dream of me, if it makes you feel happy.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Me: It makes me feel sad when I wake up and you're not there.

Her: That is the trick of the dream. That is the trick that makes you feel me, and touch me as if I am real but I am just a memory.

Me: Aren't memories real?

Suddenly the connection is lost and I'm flying over a field again.

What about you? Did you try a conversation with someone from your dream? I don't know what is real and what is not. My dreams seem so real, and it is as if I am in my own television show, except for the fact that I have little dialogue, or directorial control.

But it's no surprise our dreams are so weird, or sometimes so intense that we wake up believing that what happened in the dream was real. Every single second, our minds are recording every smell, every taste, every action, every word, every feeling, and sleep time is the only time it gets to process all the information.

So maybe we read into dreams too much. Maybe we are looking for something, and hope to find it in our dreams, just as we hope to find it in the astrological chart. We all want to know "Is it real, Is it real? We cannot just accept that it is. We all want to know the meaning behind everything, and if you pay someone enough they will always try to find a meaning for you.

Why do we need to have meaning? Because we are never satisfied with the way *it is*. The earth. The stars. The oceans. The forest. The animals. The fish. The human. That is how *it is*. Do you understand? But your mind says "No, I must explore more, I must explore and find out whether there is meaning behind any of it." So we analyse and we analyse with our big brains using thought, which is limited by memory, and imagination, which is limited by thought.

If there is a meaning out there, we won't find it looking into our own brain using thought as a probe, because it can only see what it wants to see, it has no access to anything more than your memories, your experience and your knowledge. To explore further we need a different tool. That which is indescribable, that which is insight (*grasping the inner nature of things intuitively*). Until then, we can discuss dreams and the workings of the grey blob that is our brain until pigs fly...

But let me let you in on a little secret. It's all in your mind.

[Back to Index](#)

Extremists

1. *A person who holds extreme views*

We can all be a little bit extreme from time to time. We all have opinions which can be unwavering, but in reality, there are a million different opinions, none of which can be the only correct answer. If we deal in absolutes we can never progress. Just imagine if we all still accepted that the world was flat and had never questioned it! Everybody likes to think they're right – even me! And we will argue our case until the other party backs down. Just to say “Ha! I told you I was right.”

Just because we accept it's true doesn't mean it is

In recent times, the label “extremism” has been laid at the door of islam, but that is just the media and politicians talking, using headline grabbing catchphrases. Christianity, judaism, and all the other major religions could be considered extreme, and without wanting to discuss religion here, are extreme if (a) they believe truth is the only truth and (b) if they force other people to accept what they say is true; but extremism comes in many forms, religion being just a small part.

We may hold extreme views on politics, immigration, homosexuality, sport, education, crime or race, but that is only ignorance. Ignorance of diversity. Ignorance that there are other people in the world who do not share your views. Ignorance of the fact you may not be right. Ignorance of the fact that real truth stems from openness.

If we are to learn the truth about anything, we must be open to new ideas, new suggestions and we must attempt to discover the truth for ourselves.

Let me ask you a question. Where do you get your opinions from? Who told you about this truth you believe in? Listen to this statement.

“All rapists are evil and should be locked up forever.”

Now most people have a firm opinion on rape, due to its brutality against women, so everyone would agree with the statement above, wouldn't they? What about paedophiles who prey on children, who lure children, and sexually abuse them? What should be done with them? Kill them? Lock them up and throw away the key?

But it is not the seriousness of the crimes we are interested in here, it is the attitude to the statements. How fast did you reach your opinion? Half a second? One second? How about “We should have the death penalty for child murderers,” or “it is sinful for a woman to have an abortion.” One second? Two seconds?

What we are trying to examine here is that when we make up our mind on a subject in a matter of seconds, it means we have an extreme view. This is an opinion that has been imprinted on the memory ready to be used in an instant when challenged. This is extremism, not suicide bombers, or terrorists – as the media and politicians like to call them. “Terrorism” is just action. The end result of extreme thinking. What we are discussing here, takes place in the mind long before action. I would like to use the example of the animal rights extremists.

As you have read in other topics, I am a vegetarian, and believe that as humans we should show compassion for all living things on the planet, not just our fellow humans. So, although it saddens me to see animals being experimented on by scientists, it saddens me even more to see people who supposedly love animals, terrorising the scientists who work there; or setting fire to the labs and generally causing fear to everyone associated with animal testing. Why do they do it? Because, in their distorted thinking, anyone who causes harm to these animals is a justified target, and in doing so, they lose their compassion.

In my mind, it doesn't matter the cause you are fighting for; if you are prepared to use violence to achieve your goals, (however peaceful the end result may be) you have extreme thinking. In your desire, and subsequent failure to convince everyone you are right, you have resorted to convincing people that your views are the only truth, by forcing them to accept your opinion through terror.

Let's go back to when we were children. I wonder how many of us had extreme views then. Any of us? I doubt it. So let's try to examine where this thinking originated from. As we weren't born with these views, the first people we have to look at are our parents. Think back to any views your parent's had, that you may have picked up – whether religious, political, or racial.

Most of us don't realise what an effect our parent's views have as we are beginning to form our world view from an early age. If you constantly hear your father talking about "the immigrants that came here to take our jobs," or the "failure of the government to lock up dangerous criminals," or "christianity is the only true religion," do you think it's possible that – as you respect your father – you believe what he says is the truth?

Most of our parents never encourage us to think for ourselves; in fact it is more likely they will try to stifle debate, by exercising their authority. "Don't argue," they will say. "What do you know about it anyway? You're only a child."

Instead, it is the children who should be asking "Actually father, what do you know about it? Where did you get your opinion from?"

As we get older, we form our own opinions from experience and our environment; from government, our, religion, our peers and the media; and everyone holds some opinion, left, right or centre. The problem of extremism arises when we fail to notice we are holding an opinion that does not allow any other views. When we are so convinced that our way is the only way, we become single-minded and our mind loses its flexibility to be open to different trains of thought.

The key to understanding extremism is to understand ourselves. To watch ourselves in action, and pose the question "Why do I think like this? Is this the only way?" Before you have a debate with another, debate with yourself. Go on, try it! Pick a topic you hold a very strong or singled-minded view on, and ask yourself: "Why do I hold this belief to be true?" Ask yourself if holding that view, in your opinion, makes your thinking extreme. Remember, there is always another way than the one we know.

There will always be truths we have yet to discover, and that is the greatest thing about being human. The ability to use our minds to find out the truth of something. We should never hold an opinion that is absolute. Throughout our long history, people have held views that have been accepted as "definitely and most certainly, the truth," whether scientific or religious, only to be challenged later, and replaced with another that is "definitely and most certainly, the truth."

Opinion

- 1. A personal belief or judgement that is not founded on proof or certainty*
- 2. A vague idea in which some confidence is placed*

I have come to realise that pushing our opinions onto other people turns them against us. Opinions are merely that. An opinion. People do not like to be forced to agree with us, they want to make their own minds up. So if we want to share an opinion with another, do not offer it as the only truth, or the only way, because there are a billion opinions out there in the world. Just ask anybody! We cannot hope that everyone will agree with us.

Whilst reading this book, I am sure there are lots of things you don't agree with, because you have another opinion, but all I ask is that people approach life with an open mind. There is no right way to truth, only a long journey of discovery. Extremism stops people from embarking on that voyage of discovery because it limits the mind.

[Back to Index](#)

F

Fashion

1. *The latest and most admired style in clothes and cosmetics and behaviour*
2. *Consumer goods (especially clothing) in the current mode*

What's the fashion this year? Monk or punk?

Fashion. The most up to date, the most current, the most admired. If someone says it's fashionable, and you're wearing it, you're in the in-crowd. When we're young we plead with our parents to buy us the most fashionable trainers, jeans, t-shirts, and music. These are must haves if a teenager is to earn the respect of his peers. The majority are wearing it, listening to it, or doing it.

If skateboarding is "in," we have to have one, and the skateboarding clothes to go with the image, of course. If short blonde hair is in, we've got to have our hair cut that way. If red is this years colour; if jazz is this years music; thai is this years food; zen buddhism is this years religion; or organic is this years food choice, we've got to have it.

Whatever we do revolves around fashion, and if you're not following it, people deride you for your choices; they don't look up to you, and they certainly don't respect you. Not convinced? Let's explore this together.

Imagine the prime minister of your country coming out to address the nation in an old green sweater, cords, and a pair of comfy country shoes! What would you think of this man as he told you he was sending the troops into war? Would you respect this man's decision? Would he inspire you with confidence? Would you think the man was capable of doing a good job?

What about a monk or a priest? What if he walked around in a pair of surf style shorts, casual t-shirt, and sunglasses? Would you think he possessed wisdom? Would you listen to him? Would you think he had real knowledge? Would you think he could advise you in your time of need? Would you respect him?

Now imagine your teacher at school. What if he had come to work dressed in punk gear – all chains and rips, with a pierced nose and ears? Would you listen to him? Would you take in what he was saying? Would he have the voice of authority? Imagine your parents, what if they dressed in the latest teen fashion? What would you think of them? Would you listen to your parents? Would you respect your parents?

The answer to all the above questions surely must be a resounding, no. Although if you can see past the clothes, and listen to the man himself, then you are on the right path.

But I think most of us would have to agree that clothes are highly important to us in society, not just because they cover our modesty, or because they are of the latest style, but because fashion is projecting who we want the world to believe we are.

That is why the prime minister wears a dark suit to project his seriousness. There is nothing flamboyant in his fashion; he wants you to listen to his voice. The priest or monk wears plain simple clothes, of specific colours depending on his religion, to convey the impression that he is above material things, and concerned only with spiritual matters. The same goes for teachers and parents. They must convey an image that is expected of them. Although each one of us believes he or she is making their own choice when it comes to fashion. That choice has already been made for us. Let me explain.

As I write this book today, I am wearing a pair of fashionable jeans (or so I have been told) a black t-shirt and a surf style hooded sweatshirt. Is that what you imagined I'd be wearing? Should someone who is writing a book like this be wearing such clothes, or should I be wearing something all together more serious! What would I wear? A flowing robe, plain of colour, devoid of style and cut, or does it really matter what I am wearing? Some people say they have no interest in fashion, but the clothes they wear do conform to some idea.

In my mind, a university lecturer may wear a check shirt, a misjudged tie, a pair of ill-fitting cords, comfortable shoes, and a jacket with patches on the elbows. His hair would be marginally unkempt and he would probably have glasses (deep thinkers always wear glasses). That is my idea of how he would look. Am I close? I don't know, but if you think across different members of society, you will always see notice choice of clothing conforms to the position they have (or believe they have) in the community.

Imagine once again, the prime minister and the cabinet, sitting around the table in board shorts and Hawaiian shirts, maybe with bleached blonde hair styled in the coolest fashion! It's unthinkable, isn't it? In fact, you would never have voted them into power if they had been dressed like that; because that style of dress does not convey seriousness. But all of it is still fashion.

Likewise, the type of music, the choice of food, the types of theatre, television programs, and books that the prime minister would read would also conform to this fashion. The government are in a "serious" (*concerned with work or important matters rather than play or trivialities*) business, so their choices

regarding the above must reflect that. So out goes drum and bass on the mobile mp3, and in comes beethoven on the cd. Out goes hamburgers and chips, and in comes filet mignon with a brandy sauce.

Whatever the job we do, however much money we earn, whatever our status in the community; we conform to fashion. We do these things not for ourselves, or even consciously really, but to project what our status is to others. It lets people know who we are before they even talk to us. Even our manner and our demeanour is tailored. The clothes you wear, the furniture you buy, the music you listen to, all must fit with how you wish to project yourself in accordance with how you wish to be received by other people.

You may wholeheartedly disagree with me on this, but think about it for a moment. Why do you make the choices you make? Is it really just for yourself or could you have been influenced by society?

In victorian times in england, gents (*wealthy landowners*) would wear top hats, and workers would wear flat caps. Why? Because it neatly divided the classes (*people having the same social or economic status*). In courts of law barristers and judges wear robes and wigs because it intimidates; it makes them seem of higher importance, and that they are “serious” people. Projection. That is all this is. The clothes we wear, the music we listen to; it doesn’t really make us more serious, or more cool, or more anti-establishment, or more spiritual. That is, and always will be, an illusion, although one accepted by most members of the human race around the world.

We need to break down these illusions; we need to understand that wearing purple robes does not mean we are more serious, more in touch with nature, or full of wisdom. The person underneath the clothes may be a serious person who thinks about serious matters concerning the world, and he may well be more in touch with nature, and he indeed may well have some wisdom to share with us all, but the robes mean nothing. The clothes he wears are only him trying to assert his position as a serious person, so we easily seek him out in a crowd.

***Strip the politician, strip the soldier.
Strip the monk, strip the president.
Strip the skateboarder, strip the model.
Strip the anarchist, strip the skinhead.
Under these clothes, you and I are all the same – human
It is only our minds that are different.***

The choice of clothes we wear are, in fact, meaningless; they merely allow other people in society to identify with us. A punk will seek out another punk; a monk will seek out another monk, because they can identify with each other. Through the clothes they wear, the places they go, the things they do, the things they talk about, they become almost homogeneous. But it is all fashion. If the monk decides one day to become a punk, he must take on not only the clothes but the attitudes, choice of music, and personality that is expected of a punk. He must conform to the idea.

So, if everything is fashion how do we transcend it? Do we have to, or are we all happy to be pigeon-holed into our little boxes? You may like what your clothes say about you. You may like what your choice of music or religion says about you. You may not want to change, and anyway, if you did change, what would you change into!

If you were a suit wearing politician and you chose to wear bright casual clothes, you would merely be projecting another image. If you’ve ever seen our leaders on tv when they want to be shown in a relaxed state you’ll know what I mean. Their public relations people tell them to take their jacket and tie off and roll up their sleeves! It really is all nonsense. It doesn’t mean anything! It doesn’t mean that now they are less serious, or more relaxed, just that they want to show you that they have “another side,” a more relaxed side, that they are in fact human, but it is just an illusion.

It is amazing that clothes have this ability isn’t it? To make statements about you, without you even having to speak.

You can see a man and a woman with dreadlocks coming down the road, dressed in hemp clothing and you instantly know they are “in touch with the earth, man,” may smoke marijuana, will talk about saving the trees and how bad capitalism is. How do you know so much about these people? You have never met them before; you know nothing of their genetic history, their family history, or indeed anything of their minds, and what they do for a job. But I bet you could take a random guess and come up with something pretty close to

the truth!

That's amazing, isn't it? You must be some kind of mind reader! But of course, you're not. You have a mental stereotype (*a conventional or formulaic conception or image*) which applies to them based on education, experience, media, and memory; and the dreadlocked pair have helped you come to that conclusion by projecting exactly that image to you. You see, people want to be stereotyped in this way and classified. It makes them feel good. But of course you don't need to have dreadlocks, be a hippie, smoke marijuana, or indeed remain unwashed for long periods to care about the environment.

An anarchist doesn't want to dress anonymously, neither does a monk; why would they bother being an anarchist or a monk if no one knew they were? We *want* people to know what kind of people we are, where we stand in the world, socially and politically; we don't want to just blend into the crowd. We want to stand out (even if we pretend we just want to fit in).

I want people to know who "I" am. It makes me feel powerful. I want you to know that by covering myself with tattoos, piercings, and scruffy clothes that I don't fit in with your society, but of course you do; you are part of society, which is just me and you. You are still conforming with the other people who have tattoos and piercings and scruffy clothes, so you can all go around together saying "Yeah, we don't wanna be a part of your society, man." But of course, the tattooed man could just as quickly swap his scruffy anti society image for that of a city business type. A quick haircut, an expensive tailored suit and shoes, and hey presto! Instant transformation. Now he can complain about the scruffy, tattooed, pierced anti-social hooligans who roam the streets. It's as easy as that!

Clothes project who you want others to believe you are. It is not the real you, not the authentic self, but a self that wants to conform to someone else's idea and you want to fit in with that idea. The great thing about fashion is that you can swap fashions on a whim. Today I am wearing a pair of jeans and a hooded sweatshirt. Tomorrow I could be wearing monk's robes.

Would you take me more seriously if I were wearing the robes? Please think about this carefully.

We are conditioned to believe that people wearing certain clothes are of a certain type (they may well be, but only because they have packaged themselves in this way). What type do you want to be? How do you want to fit in? Are you a monk, or punk, or somewhere in between?

When we choose clothes, music, food, cinema, tv programs, we may be thinking we like it, but if we liked something that didn't conform with our fashion stereotype would we feel comfortable doing it, and telling our peer group about it?

Would the prime minister of the country let on that he liked watching daytime soaps on tv and eating pie and chips when he is expected to like hi-brow "serious" programs, and is expected to have acquired a taste for fine french food? What if the teen skateboarder let on to his friends that he didn't like grungy skateboarder music but actually liked bach and beethoven, going to the opera, and having discussions on philosophy after school! It just wouldn't happen would it? Because once you have accepted the stereotype you must conform to all aspects of it.

Fashion is not just about clothes, it's a whole package

I am not trying to tell you you shouldn't buy new clothes or music – it's nice to have these things; but merely to notice yourself in action; to notice your thinking regarding choices you make, and ask yourself: "Am I making this choice because I as an individual want to make it, or am I conforming to the image I wish to project to others?"

Of course, our choices are influenced by our peer groups, that is inevitable, as Man is a social animal. We want to be in the "in-group" not the "out-group," so if our friends all like rap, why would we choose jazz? We want our friends to accept us so we want to make choices in line with the group.

But although Man is a social animal, he is also able to exist alone, and that is the challenge that faces us now, whether we are prepared to stand up as individuals, whether we are prepared to forge a path on our own without the packaging. Whether we are prepared to give up conforming to an idea, and stop projecting false selves onto other people.

To care for the environment without having to make a fashion statement. To contemplate the self and humanity without wearing robes. To work and to play, without concerning ourselves about people judging us

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

because of our choice of clothes or music. To *stop* concerning ourselves in projecting an image so people think we are intelligent, rich, or enlightened. To live an authentic life where the only thing you are projecting is the real you. The real human being, free of the shackles of fashion and conformity.

This may possibly be one of the hardest things to do in life, but the key to unlocking the real you is through understanding of yourself. To look deep inside and find someone who doesn't want to offer an image he thinks the world wants to see, who is happy in their own skin, whatever the clothes. It is only when the clothes become who you are that you lose sight of the real you.

Next time you get dressed, put on a piece of music, choose a tv program, or pick up a book, just ask yourself: "Is this really me, or is it just someone I want the rest of the world to see?"

[Back to Index](#)

Fast Food

1. *Inexpensive food (hamburgers or chicken or milkshakes) prepared and served quickly*

Many of you will wonder what I will be dealing with in “fast food,” since I have already dealt with the subject of the one-minute meal in the “takeaways” topic, but fast food is more than just fatty hamburgers, chicken drumsticks, and sickly soft drinks; fast food is anything you don’t grow yourself.

It will shock most of you to think that the local seasonal organic beans you have to soak overnight, before you cook and season before eating, are fast food, but they are. Anything you buy off the shelf is fast food. It doesn’t matter whether it is organic or local. The time taken to grow it from seed, nurture it, and harvest it, versus the time it took you to take it off the shelf and pay for it at the counter, makes it most definitely, fast food! So with that out of the way let us begin our discussion.

It is only in the last hundred years or so that food has been readily available, even in industrialised nations; it has been in limited supply during that time too – due to two world wars – but already we are reliant on it being constantly available. We wouldn’t know what to do if the food was not on the shelves of our local grocer or supermarket. We are dependent on someone else providing our food, and as if by magic, there is always a steady supply of seasonal and unseasonal vegetables, meat and fruit, appearing colourful and fresh at a reasonable price.

“That’s what I call progress,” I hear you cry. “Food for all! No more hunger.” And for the more well off that seems to be true; nothing but the finest organic vegetables and beef for them, though I’m afraid it’s chips and processed meat pies for the less well off, as fresh food is always more expensive than processed factory food.

Come on, you should know that. It’s only the better off who can afford to eat well. If you’re on a low income you’ll be surviving on fried potatoes and other cheap food high in fat to sustain you. Your health will suffer, but hey, if only you were more intelligent and better qualified you could get a better job, and then you could eat organic. Oh, and don’t even think of becoming a vegetarian on compassionate or health grounds; you just can’t afford it. You *will* be able to afford all the chocolate, crisps, and soft drinks though. They’re priced to sell at anyone’s budget.

Where does all this food come from?

Why do you need to know where your food comes from? All you need to know is that it’s here now, at price you can afford, so you should buy it, even if you don’t need it. You are a consumer, so consume, don’t ask silly questions that don’t concern you. I’m sure most of you don’t care anyway. As long as they have broccoli on the shelf, the mushrooms you like, or the piece of steak you want, you’ll be happy.

You have been lucky to grow up in a country that is able to supply surplus agriculture (a lot of which goes to waste), and there will always be enough food for you to eat. Remember, the economy relies on you being well fed. No food equals no work. They’ll make sure there’s plenty to eat. Oh, for anyone reading this in a country where half your population is starving to death, this section doesn’t apply to you; please see sections on government, oh and weapons, oh, and corruption, amongst others...

**

I was born in Scotland, in 1969, and grew up in southern England. I have never been short of anything in my life. The shelves in my local stores have always been full. My mother has never complained that the shelves were empty again. We have never wanted for any types of food. Everything has always been available for as long as I can remember. All vegetables, all meats, all dairy, all packaged, all dried goods, and all sweets. Perfect. We haven’t suffered a day’s shortage of our most favourite items. But let’s imagine we did. Let’s all imagine that one day the food stopped coming. One day the shelves became empty permanently. What would you do? “Where did all the food go?”

Suddenly the question “where does all this food come from?” doesn’t seem so stupid after all. Food, as those people who have lived through war or experienced any kind of dictatorship know, is also a weapon. Withholding food to gain the subservience of the population is an effective method of control. Think about it. I am not telling you this to scare you. On the contrary, I am trying to empower you as individuals. Whoever controls the food controls the people. Remember that.

**

Large scale farming operations are not a new concept. Man first domesticated animals several thousand years ago, and began to settle in one place and farm the land; agriculture was born. Over the centuries, the ability to feed more than just a single family proved a much more efficient method than everyone trying to grow their own food. It freed Man to become a specialist. It allowed cities to be built, new trades to start; it allowed people time to think, to invent, and create without the threat of starvation over them at all times. Although it has not been an easy road.

There have been many years of failed crops and the resulting deaths from hunger, but we are now in an envious position in the west (and many other developed countries) of having a real surplus of food. We now grow too much for our needs.

Unfortunately, it has led us becoming complacent. Who now worries they won't get enough to eat tonight? Even the unemployed receive money from the government, which allows them to buy enough food, so I would like to talk about something which I believe to be vitally important and should be to you. I would like to talk about growing your own vegetables.

"What? Grow my own vegetables! I don't have time for that, I'm much too busy, and I live in an apartment block."

Hopefully, we all agree that eating vegetables is pretty good for us. They contain essential nutrients brain and body need for healthy operation; the problem is, they are also quite expensive – even in supermarkets – compared to filling, carbohydrate based food, or anything which comes pre-processed and pre-packaged. It always seems that the more nutritious something is for you, the more expensive it is.

That's because when things are pure, you can't add any cheap filler to them, which is precisely what large food manufacturers do. They use all sorts of weird and wonderful ingredients that (a) you've never heard of and (b) you don't really want to have heard of! In the purest forms, unmodified, and untreated with chemicals, our fruit and vegetables are expensive to buy.

So what reason is there for you to buy them when you can get sweeter, more filling food for half the price? It may not be obvious to you if you have grown up on a diet of fish fingers, frozen burgers, potato croquettes, tinned veg, crisps, and cola drinks, but our system wasn't designed for the stuff we throw down our throats! Does that surprise you?

Whether god created us, or we evolved from the apes, our highly advanced digestive systems weren't expecting the sort of artificial junk we call food now. Nature provides well, and has done for every other species for the past four billion years. Each species lives happily on their species specific diet of either meat, fish, insects, plants, or grass, and doesn't waver from it.

You wouldn't see a cow thinking, "Hmm, maybe I'll have some meat tonight, or maybe some nice insects." Why? Because the cow eats what is beneficial for the system. The human being on the other hand is a veritable jack of all trades when it comes to eating and drinking (all credit to our systems for coping with the regular abuse from all the unnatural substances we consume).

If evolution is to be believed, we came from the apes and ate a nut and fruit diet, which has evolved into a burger, chips, and cola diet over the past few million years. Progress? I don't think so.

Without going too far off the track, what do you think large scale food manufacturing businesses are interested in? Are they interested in making sure no one goes hungry? No, that'll be the government's job. Are they interested in providing us with healthy food which has not been modified at the cellular level, or sprayed with harmful pesticides? No, of course not. Their job is to make money. Companies that produce food, whether it be tomatoes, or chocolate biscuits are in business, and they have to make a profit to survive. Why else would they be in business? They are no different to a company that wants to sell us a new tv, dvd player, or mobile phone!

Don't tell me you're too busy to care where your food comes from...

Food is the biggest consumer business of them all! Everyone's a potential customer. You may already have a mobile phone or not want to buy a new tv, but you have to eat every day or you'll die. That may sound a bit extreme, but it's not. At best you'd last about two weeks with no food, and then your body would start to eat itself in order to survive. First the fat reserves, then the muscle. Then when there's nothing left to burn, ultimately, death. If that isn't a captive market, I don't know what is!

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

The people starving in africa (and other regions where food is scarce), where crops fail regularly, and the economy is mismanaged by corrupt officials, will know this feeling all too well. But anyway, let's not worry about them. We're all right. We've got plenty. All the big agribusinesses make sure there's always enough food to go around (at a price).

Food isn't free of course. It's part of the economy. The farms have large costs they need to recoup. Chemicals. Labour. Water. You know, the usual costs associated with running a business. Except this is not just any business, is it? This is our lives we're talking about here. Shut down the farms, and the country withers away – very quickly.

Are you still not interested?

Years ago, there used to be such things as communities, where people did things for each other and for the benefit of others. But this was before my time, and probably before yours. This was before the individual was advised by his government leadership to stick his finger up at every one else, and say "I'm in it for me." People were encouraged to only think about themselves, so what did they do? Like all sheep, exactly what they were told. Everything now had a price. No one did anything unless he could turn a quick profit on it.

People used to have vegetable and fruit gardens. My parents even had one for a short time in the seventies, but quickly grassed over it, because it became too much work to keep turning over the soil, and anyway, it was much easier to go down to the supermarket and buy beautiful looking produce, and anyway, my dad was too busy trying to make money to worry about a couple of carrots, and the birds usually got to the raspberries before we did...

In the past, everybody who had any space outdoors used to grow at least some vegetables; whether for economic, social, or historic, reasons, or grown merely as a hobby, it makes no difference; the fact is, that Man had control of his food. It may not have been everything he needed, but the fact he took the seed, planted it, watered it, watched it germinate, nurtured it as it grew, and finally harvested it, direct to his table, says more about the connection of Man to the earth than any other human activity.

Sharing the garden food amongst the community (i.e. neighbours) may seem alien to us now, but back when people had garden plots, they were happy to exchange some of one for type for some of another. Listen:

"What are you growing there, fred?"

"Cabbages & cauliflowers."

"Do you need any broccoli? I've got plenty this year..."

"Yeah that'd be great; I'll give you some cauliflowers and some cabbage in exchange."

"Great!"

I can't see that same conversation striking up in my local english commuter town where the supermarket is king, can you? The idea of growing your own food and sharing it (or even selling it) seems a rather quaint idea in the era of agribusiness where a cabbage patch less than a mile long isn't worth planting.

Food is vital to the survival of our species, and every other species on earth, and it is about time we started waking up to the fact that the very thing that keeps us alive is now "voluntarily" out of our control and in the hands of the same people who sell us mobile phones. Large businesses.

Do you think these large businesses put the same kind of love and energy into the growing of their fruit and vegetables that fred put into growing his cabbages? Large food business is a production line, and there is no love on a production line. The connection that Man had to the earth, through the cultivation of crops has long since vanished, replaced by profit margins and balance sheets.

Fruit and vegetables – whatever varieties in your particular country or region – are the most essential part of our diet. We can all do without meat, eggs, and dairy products and live healthily. I do! But without fruit and vegetables, I wouldn't get the right amount of nutrients necessary each day to sustain a healthy system.

Are you a sheep?

Are you happy to allow someone else to have complete control over your food? Will you let business rule the

food supply? Will you take back your role as a creator, and grow life sustaining food? Will you recreate the bond between Man and earth by planting and storing seed (which is necessary for life), or will you just carry on the way you are?

You eat healthily. You eat what they tell you you're supposed to eat for a healthy lifestyle. You buy organic, you do your bit, and after all you're a bit busy, but well, it could be a good talking point that "guess what, I am growing my own organic fruit and vegetables...." "Wow!" They will all say!

Or you could just not care, which is what most people will do, because after all, why should you bother! You're too busy, and anyway it's a good thing having big business in control of the food, because it's a lot cheaper. And anyway you're too tired after work...Wasn't life supposed to be getting easier? Why make it harder? And now, the rest of you can join in!

"I live in an apartment, how can I grow my own fruit and vegetables?"

"I can't see any point in doing this."

"What's in it for me?"

"Why spend all season growing something to get one meal out of it?"

"I could think of better ways to spend my days than digging the garden!"

"I am a one parent family on income support, what do you expect me to do, I have a hard enough life as it is!"

I don't know, but I'm sure there are lots of you thinking "What is he going on about? Why is this so important?" Because, food is the key to the universe. Food is the energy that flows through your veins that developed the brain that took Man to the stars. With something that powerful, would you give control of it to a board of directors?

This topic is of the utmost importance to the world. Let's show some respect to the work our ancestors put in over the last ten thousand years that has enabled us to have food on demand, and remember that whilst its production is in the hands of large businesses, and not individuals or communities supporting local communities, it can always be taken away again. Why would you let that happen?

Not only that, it's fun and rewarding to watch a seed grow, then savour its taste as you harvest it and eat it for dinner! Wow! You'll be involved in a process called life. What more could you ask for? Could you really say you have that involvement when you casually buy the strawberries packed in a punnet all neatly wrapped in plastic?

I am not so naive to think you will all stop purchasing all your products from anywhere else and attempt your own mini-farms in the suburbs. All I am doing is planting the seed...

[Back to Index](#)

Fear

1. *An emotion experienced in anticipation of some specific pain or danger (usually accompanied by a desire to flee or fight)*
2. *An anxious feeling*
3. *A profound emotion inspired by a deity*

What are you afraid of? Are you afraid of something bad happening to you; are you afraid that someone might kill you or your family? It seems that this is the case now. We double bolt our doors, we lock our windows, we lock our cars, we are afraid walking down a dark street in case we are attacked, we have a police force and an army to make us feel less afraid. We even buy lethal weapons to protect us, but nothing seems to allay our fears.

We are all afraid sometimes, and sometimes the fear is real, related to a specific danger we can physically see (such as a man pointing a gun at my head); but generally, the fear is just an anxious feeling, with no place in reality.

We are afraid of something happening, that although we cannot yet see, triggers our ancient fear response system, fight or flight, which prepares the body to defend itself, or run away. So fear is a natural response, generated by the brain to protect us, and it has served us well.

In the past, if we didn't have this fear, we would have been eaten by wild beasts looking for their next meal, so not having this auto-response would have signalled the end for homo sapiens. A being with no fear response cannot judge danger and becomes a victim, simple as that. So in the knowledge that this is normal we can progress with our enquiries further.

Throughout history, humans have fought one another for territory, females, and food, something we share with other species; so this response has kept our family groups safe from harm. This is the natural world at work. This is pure survival of the species. Unfortunately, the fear response was only supposed to be generated in the moment – the moment we were actually being attacked – not in response to some unknown attack that may, or may not occur in the future; that is a wholly modern problem.

We are afraid of everybody we don't know. If we pass someone on the street who looks a certain way, or who acts in a certain fashion, we are instantly afraid. We rush to our destination and lock the door behind us. Only then do we feel safe. So what is this feeling? If the person did not try to attack us or cause us harm why were we afraid of him? What is this feeling of relief we get when we get home and bolt ourselves in? What causes us to feel fear when we pass one man and not another? Well, I would like to talk to you about your brain!

Thanks to our unique human brain, we can construct our world view "on the fly," and we use all tools at our disposal including experience, memory, and imagination. To give you a clearer example of what I mean, I recently asked my girlfriend from the czech republic about fear.

"If you were walking down a dimly lit street at night and you saw two black men approaching you, would you be afraid?"

"Why would I be afraid of a black man?" she answered.

"Would you not think they may try to attack you, rob you, or rape you?"

"No, of course not."

"Well is there someone you would be afraid of?"

"Oh yes, if I saw two gipsy men walking towards me, I'd be petrified, I'd definitely turn and walk quickly the other way."

"Why?"

"Because you can't trust them, they'll steal from you any chance they can."

What do you think of this observation? For someone in london, it may be the opposite; but what I would like to explore with you, is that people are making automatic – though not necessarily instinctive – judgements about a human being from a distance. How do we do this?

Well, we hear on the television that a black man killed someone, or we hear reported that a black man was involved in some crime or other. We then hear our parents' or friends' opinions on black people, and we make an automatic association with that memory when we next encounter a black man, whether or not we have any experience of being attacked by someone who looks like that!

It makes no difference if it is a black man, indian, arab, white man, chinese man, or someone who just wears clothing that resembles a man you saw on tv being sought by the police for a violent rape. The mind takes the image, which it then stores, takes the description of the threat through language, and both are combined in the fear database which is then tested against everyone you encounter in your daily life to see if it fits, just like a police mug-shot.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

“The perpetrator has black skin, shifty eyes, is heavily built, wearing a grey tracksuit, be on the look out for anyone who resembles this description, but do not approach him, he is highly dangerous.” reports the police spokesman on the radio.

Then the good old imagination kicks in when you see someone who has some slight resemblance to the man wanted: “Oh my god, that man looks like the man they’re looking for on the tv. What if he attacks me?” The stereotype is born. Even if the man you just passed was not a violent mugger, rapist, or a murderer, he suddenly becomes one – or at least has the potential to become one, when tested against the image in your fear database.

“Yes, but so many black men do attack women...”

“Muslims (because they may look the same as a terrorist you saw a photo of) are fanatics, look at the number of people they have blown up in the world...”

And yes, some black people can be violent, some muslims may blow themselves up, some men wearing tracksuits do steal from people, but some businessmen in suits kill people, some policemen are violent, some loving husbands and fathers are serial killers and rapists, but so many aren’t, and don’t!

How many black robbers are there in the world? How many white serial killers, chinese rapists, or arab suicide bombers? The fact remains that whoever you believe and whatever you see on television, not everyone who you think looks like they may kill you is actually going to do it! You may think you know, but you have no idea what is going on in someone else’s mind. Until they do something in the moment.

*“but what if?”
“you never know”
“you have to be on your guard”*

We are so worried that something may happen to us that we prepare for the event in case it ever does, which, if you like statistics, will probably never happen. Living your life predicting that something bad is going to happen to you or your family is like living life trapped in an invisible prison, one offear of the unknown.

“But a gypsy killed my family, isn’t that proof enough to be scared of gypsies?”

When we all start thinking like this, we have condemned everyone on the planet.

Let’s talk about the unknown for a moment shall we? What is the unknown? Well according to the dictionary, it is simply “*not known before*,” and although you may feel uncomfortable or apprehensive in a foreign country or area, or may stand out because of your dress, skin colour, or the language you speak, not everyone is going to kill you; the same goes for your own area or country. And even if they did, what are you actually afraid of? Death, which is final, or the moment when someone attacks you? Aren’t you actually just imagining how afraid you *will* feel, even though the event has not yet happened and may never happen?

It is sad that we have developed such generalised anxiety in relation to the unknown. It is stopping us from transcending fear, and seeing it for what it is; an automatic emotional response designed to protect us from the jaws of wild beasts. It may be that the world has become more violent and we must protect ourselves, but humans have always been violent towards each other. There is nothing in our development that has suggested otherwise, but that is something that needs to be dealt with by the violent individuals, they have to know their minds, and learn compassion for other human beings. That is not our problem.

You and I have a short time available to live a fulfilling life on this planet, and fear holds us back. It limits our minds, it does not allow us to show compassion for everyone. It is the judge and the censor, protecting us from an imagined violent death.

Watch the zebras and antelopes grazing on the savannah on the great plains of africa. Do they show fear even though there is a lion sitting only a hundred metres from them? No. They carry on with life. They are aware of the lion, and do not willingly put their heads in its mouth, but they have work to do. They have to eat, and eat they do. It is only when the lion is hungry, and starts stalking them, that they take notice and make a run for it.

In the same manner, humans automatically defend themselves if their life is to continue. So if someone attacks you, that is the moment when showing fear will be the last thing on your mind. It is our nature to want to survive, and you will do anything you can to survive, just like the zebras do when the lion attacks. Whether by using language to calm the situation, using the flight mechanism or in the case where it is

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

impossible to do either, fighting off your attacker hopefully with the help of compassionate strangers (although I am not so naive as to think that adopting a non-violent stance, whilst someone is holding a knife to your throat, intent on killing you, is the way forward either.)

Violence is deeply entrenched in our brains, as is fear, and it is our responsibility as humans to understand both of them, and in doing so, transcend them.

*I will embrace the unknown
I am not afraid of you
You may hurt me, you may kill me
but in my mind I am free
I will not let fear imprison my mind*

We are all afraid of different things. Some people are afraid of flying, some afraid of heights, some of being alone, some of the dark, but I think the one thing that unites us all in fear, is the fear of death. When someone talks about being afraid of flying it is not the flying that causes the increased heartbeat and sweaty palms, but a fear of crashing and ultimately dying.

These may be extreme examples, but fear is universal, it affects everything we do in life – the way we act, the way we plan. We are all so afraid! Of what? The unknown? The future?

You see, you cannot be afraid of the past, it is a technical impossibility. Why? Because you have already experienced it, so it is not unknown any more. All this silly fear thing is about is the fear of the future, of events that have not yet happened or may never happen, because... They are in the future! We must see through this together right now. If I am afraid of the future, how can I live life peacefully today?

“I am afraid that my marriage might fail. I imagine scenes of anguish, I imagine about where I would live, what would happen to the children, what would I do, who would want me if I am divorced with three children...”

Except it hasn't happened! Thanks to your imagination (which is a wonderful thing if used to imagine positive and happy things), you are now worked up about an event that not only hasn't happened, but may never happen. Bring your mind back to NOW. The present. This moment. You have it within your power to attempt to save your marriage, and if you can't, well you will have to deal with that when the moment arises.

“I am afraid I will not pass my exam, and then I will not get a good job, I imagine my parents being angry with me, my teachers being disappointed with me, and my friends laughing at me because they passed and I didn't. I see myself working as a labourer for the rest of my life, I imagine myself living in a tiny flat, not the nice house I thought I would live in...”

Except it hasn't happened. You still have a chance to study to get good marks to get the good job, and if you don't, it's not the end of the world, but you will deal with that when the moment arises.

Do you see? It is not the actual event we fear. It is not the lion charging at us less than fifty metres away we fear, it is the thought that one day a lion may come, and may attack us and may kill us, and oh, how terrible that would be. Can you see now? Fear of the unknown is just a misuse of the imagination. Do not fear the unknown, being afraid of it will not help you right now!

I am amazed by how many clairvoyants there are out there. You can all see such terrible things happening in your future! It's amazing that the world is still such a wonderful place with all of you imagining such terrible things. If you wish to look into the future and imagine, try imagining a peaceful life for yourself and all of your family and friends and a life filled with fun, laughter, and love. That is the best you could ever imagine.

I want to spend a little time going back to when we were young, before we became adults full of fear. Do you remember being scared as a child? I do, but not in the same way I am now. I was not afraid of people because of their skin colour, or worried about dying in a plane crash. Life was too much of an adventure to be scared, and anyway, I had my parents to reassure me that everything was going to be all right.

I remember being scared of the dark, as every child presumably is at some point, but looking back, I can see that the dark was just the unknown. You couldn't see anything that was familiar, so the imagination starts conjuring up crazy thoughts, which inevitably leaves you feeling so scared that you have to run into your mum and dad's room! I always remember being lost (for moments only) in a supermarket where I couldn't

see my mum, and I instantly felt scared. Where was she, had she left me? But fear of abandonment is quite natural for a child; they need the protection of their parents until they are grown up enough to look after themselves.

What I want to understand with you here, is where the fear developed from. We are born with a hard wired fight or flight mechanism designed to stop us being killed, but is it possible we are also born with a fear of the unknown?

As humans, we develop later than most animals and we need protecting, but a baby cannot be scared of being attacked or killed, or have a fear of flying because it has no concept of it in his brain. As he grows up, he sees a boy punch another boy, he hears anger, he listens to his father talk about people, he sees news on the tv, he listens to his teachers; and when adults start talking children *should* start to be afraid, because they are bringing all their social conditioning, experience, education, prejudices, and general opinions to the children and presenting them as fact!

They may not even know they are doing it, but little by little the information trickles into the child's brain, and with no other information available to compare it with, it is quietly stored. Parents also like to scare children, even if it's only for fun. They tell them scary stories, and tell them something bad will happen to them if they don't say their prayers.

They insist it's good for children to be scared sometimes, because then they will realise that the world is a big scary dangerous place. Well, it is for the adults, because they've helped make it like that, and they think they are doing a worthwhile thing by preparing the children for adulthood, but all that is happening is a new generation growing up in fear, thanks to adults driving home the "watch out! be alert! be on guard!" message to their children.

There are many people in the world whose thinking causes them to act in ways that cause others to suffer, and people do commit murder, they do rape, and they do steal, but the real fear lies within the parent, and because they are afraid, they automatically pass this on to their children. I am afraid of X therefore you should be afraid of X.

A child doesn't know any different, it looks to the parent for love, protection, values, opinions, and as they respect their parents, will use their view above anyone else's – even their own – whilst they are developing. Adults make children fear the world, and in turn those children become adults who fear, thereby creating an everlasting cycle.

Do you think this is how the most advanced species on the planet should be behaving? Is this "just a phase" we are going through, that we will "grow out of," or do you think we will continue to become more afraid? Do you think our cavemen ancestors were afraid? I would think most definitely! But of wild beasts, not of each other.

You see, in the past, we lived in small family, or kinship (*a close connection marked by community of interests or similarity in nature or character*) groups. We knew everyone. They were our friends and family and we looked after each other (even if we fought from time to time), in much the same way that small villages exist throughout the world today; but things started to change as we became more organised, and food was no longer hunted and gathered.

Agriculture was born, and with the surplus of food created, people were able to specialise, we came together in larger groups, and we found we knew fewer and fewer people. Cities were built, and people came to the city to work. Family and kinship group ties were severed, and increasingly, people found themselves working in geographical areas they were unfamiliar with, working with people they didn't know.

Then families started migrating to these cities from other countries. People who looked different, ate differently, spoke differently, even smelled differently. And over time the links back to these groups who looked after each other, who worked and lived together in familiar terrain became severed completely.

People were now on their own, and that caused them distress. Men were now separated from their families by large distances in order to earn money to provide food, and other essentials. The more money we earned, the more possessions we could then afford to buy – from the "essential," to the luxurious. After some time when we had built up an array of possessions, and we suddenly realised that someone, anyone could come and take them all away from us. The possessions we had worked hard for!

Our emotions responded, by letting us feel the same fear we would if someone was trying to steal our food – in essence, a survival instinct. Except we didn't need these possessions to survive. Our brains were not advanced enough to tell the difference between real life and death situations and imagined ones, but gave

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

us the emotional response all the same, and prepared us for fight or flight. For such a seemingly advanced species, it is interesting to note that we still fear everything around us.

“Lock the door, you never know who may come in and try to rob us”

“Make sure you keep you watch your wallet someone might steal it”

“Don’t talk to any strangers”

“Avoid dark alleyways at night”

Security vs. Fear

Whilst writing this topic, I am volunteering at a place called holy island, a small island off the isle of arran in scotland, accessible only by boat. It is a mainly buddhist community, dedicated to peace on earth, and environmental sustainability. There are about fifteen volunteers, and there are courses in meditation going on throughout the year.

Do I feel afraid here? Would you feel afraid here? No, I feel no fear, and I’m sure you wouldn’t either. Why? Because I know the people here, although strangers to me, mean me no harm. I know they all want peace and harmony in the world; there are no drugs, no alcohol, and no sexual tension between the sexes. I don’t worry about locking my room, and neither do the other volunteers. There is an underlying trust that bonds everyone.

Compare this to the town or city you live in. Are you sure the people living there mean you no harm? You can never be sure of anyone’s intentions, so obviously you would lock your door at night. It would be foolhardy of me to suggest in a large community to leave your doors unlocked to show you are not afraid, but can you not see what has happened?

We have gone from small, sharing communities where everyone helps, not only themselves, but their neighbours too, to a selfish “I want” society where we have become addicted to possessions. Whether that possession be a portable tv or a car, like small children, we shout “it’s mine, don’t touch it!” We greedily hang on to our “stuff,” not even caring that we can’t take it with us when we die; we just have to have things. It makes us feel comfortable and secure, like a safety blanket, and that is why we must protect our possessions from others who want them...

It seems to me that we are more afraid of losing our possessions than we are of someone coming to attack us. We jealously guard what is ours. We secure our homes with huge locks, gates, and alarms constantly on the alert in case someone breaks in! Do you not think all this is getting a little ridiculous that we want possessions so badly that we have to lock them up to protect them! Are they really worth all the extra stress of caring for them? On the one hand you do have to have some security to stop someone just walking in and taking everything you have worked for, but you will start to notice that the more you have, the more afraid you will become of losing it.

I am not advising you to give up all your possessions, that would probably make you too anxious, but a man living simply, even in a city where he does not know anyone will have no fear, and if you don’t believe me, just try it!

When you have no gold, no fancy cars, no electric gates, no fancy wide screen tv, no cash spilling out of your wallet, what do you have to be afraid of. What will you lose? “What if someone attacks me,” I hear you say, but really, what are the chances of it actually happening? The more you fear an event the more afraid you will become. I think we have lost the trust in others, the natural benefit of the doubt we give to strangers, and we now believe that everyone we meet is a potential assassin or robber. Don’t you think it’s time we re-evaluated our opinions of others and go into life each day with love in our hearts?

Where there is love there is no fear

Not everyone will have the chance to live on a beautiful remote island dedicated to peace and harmony, in fact the majority of us will have to live in major towns or cities and live amongst strangers. Yes, some may be violent, some may be killers, drug addicts, hooligans, or robbers, but if you live your life focussed on the

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

positive in people and dedicate yourself to a life of peace (no matter what job you do), you will find fear flows out your very being.

By choosing this path, you will find that your life will take a different course. You will no longer want and need the same things you did before, thereby freeing yourself from the prison of fear that accompanies possessions. Stop and think about this carefully for a moment and ask yourself the following question: “What would I gain from living a more simple life?” And follow it by the second question: “What would I lose by living a more simple life?” If you weigh up the two and find you would be losing more than you gained, well you will just have to keep living the way you are, but be prepared to keep fear in your life. Fear of losing all your lovely possessions. All your shiny jewellery, your money, your car...

Hang on to it all with a death grip, because someone out there who also loves possessions wants to take it all away from you, so you will have to secure it more and more, and shut yourself away from civilisation. Just in case! It’s incredible, isn’t it? You are probably more afraid of being robbed in the street than you are of actually dying!

In closing, remember we are all here for such a short time, that fear is irrational; we could die tomorrow. Let’s concentrate on living and enjoying the time we have here on this wonderful planet instead of worrying about bad things happening to us all the time.

You are a part of the most violent and powerful species on the planet,
what are you afraid of?

[Back to Index](#)

Flying

1. An instance of travelling by air

I don't know if you have ever flown in an aeroplane, but for me, it is one of the most exhilarating experiences of my life. I don't know whether it is the excitement of going somewhere new with a different culture, or language, or the trepidation of climbing on board two hundred tons of metal to be hurtled six miles into the sky, or a combination of both.

I have been on many holidays and business trips by land and sea, and none match up to the experience of flight. Maybe it is because of all the things we have been able to achieve as humans, flying free like the birds has not been one of them! The invention of the aeroplane has allowed us in some small way to experience the magic of flight.

Airports are strange places, filled with people from diverse nations, all thrown together because of one desire – to go somewhere else. From the moment you arrive, something feels different. Despite the hustle and bustle of people dashing to get boarding passes, arguing with the check-in clerk over the weight of their bags, there is a calmness which doesn't exist outside the airport. Whatever people's differences, whether it be colour, religion, ideas, or jobs; they calmly stand in line to have their bags checked by security, and their passports checked by passport control.

You could be standing next to a dictator, a bank robber, a thief, or a drug addict, but you wouldn't know it. Outside the airport they are someone else, but here they just stand, silently waiting to get on the plane. Resigned to the fact that in order to get to their destination they must not draw attention to themselves.

As I stand in line, I often look around me at people, wondering who they are in real life, what they think about, and how they behave? Are they married, rich, poor, powerful, or weak? Do they dominate their family? Are they nice to their friends? Are they happy or sad? But they never give it away. They quietly watch the boards giving them instruction: "Wait in lounge;" "go to gate;" "boarding;" or "FINAL CALL." Then they gather their bags and move on to the next designated area, until finally boarding the aircraft.

The hand luggage is stowed, seat belts are fastened, shoes are loosened, books are opened, and mobiles turned off. As the doors close, a faint realisation comes over me that I am now disconnected from the world. I have no way to communicate with loved ones, no friends to laugh with, no one to argue with, just 300 strangers with only one thing in common, the need to go somewhere else.

Family crises, deals to be clinched, plots to be made, governments to be brought down. But in that aircraft, there is nothing but an uneasy togetherness.

Who knows what thoughts are in these people's minds, who knows what trouble they may cause at their destination, but as the plane taxis down the runway, and the safety demonstration tells us what to do in the "unlikely event of a landing on water," there is only one thought going through everyone's minds: "I hope I get there safely."

The wheels are aligned with the middle line, the engines start to roar, and two hundred tons of metal and highly combustible fuel hurtle towards the end of the runway. The plane gets faster and faster until ever so gently the nose starts to lift, and the ground disappears quickly behind you.

You hear a slight whirring noise as the gear is retracted and the flaps are adjusted. Upwards you go, until you go through the clouds, and no matter what the weather is doing below, thunder or snow, you are suddenly bathed in sunlight (sorry, not if you are flying at night!)

Soon, the seatbelt signs are turned off and the plane starts to level. The roar of the engines has died down, and all you hear is a constant, almost calming drone. You are here now. You and three hundred strangers doing what Man was never intended to do – fly!

Look down and, if you're lucky, you'll catch sight of the cities passing slowly underneath, or see a small dot on the ocean. You are six miles above the earth, totally reliant on Man's ingenuity. You could either scream in panic, or just relax and enjoy a wonderful experience.

What passes underneath

In my travels across the globe by plane, I have often thought about the people below – who they are, what they do, what thoughts they have, and how happy, sad, or violent they are.

Thanks to the marvellous modern invention of satellite mapping, we can now switch to a channel on our

personal entertainment console, and see a little icon of the plane superimposed on a map of countries you are passing over. Whilst we are enjoying our lunch and watching yet another hollywood blockbuster, people below are fighting, killing, or raping each other.

They may be starving, scheming, desiring, or lying, but here in our plane six miles above the earth, we are above all human emotion and action, distanced from suffering. We may ourselves be suffering, but for now it is almost as if we are suspended in time, if only for a few hours. When we touch down, reality starts again, but whilst the engines drone on powering us towards our destination, we might as well just sit back and relax.

Directly underneath us, someone may have just been shot, lying in a pool of blood, gasping their last breath on this earth; someone may be arguing with his wife over money; and another may be in the depths of despair over money owed; we may be over water, where a violent storm on the ocean is about to capsize a boat tossing all on-board into the dark ocean, but up here none of that matters. This is a new reality, one where time almost stands still, even though we are travelling at five hundred and fifty miles per hour.

Touch down

As we start to descend, a new feeling seems to engulf the people on board. They start to get edgy; they start to fidget, gathering their belongings and their thoughts. The sounds on the plane change, the hydraulics start to whirl into life, the engine pitch changes, the seatbelt signs come on, the entertainment system is turned off.

The plane starts to become more affected by the weather; it judders and shakes, banking steeply as it prepares its descent back to earth; back to “reality.” The landing gear is extended noisily and locks into place. Suddenly we start to feel reality getting closer and closer as first we make out fields and cities, then buildings and cars. We turn onto our final approach in line with the runway.

Already people are busying themselves at the airport for our arrival. The fuel truck is put on standby, and the catering and baggage trucks wait patiently, as do the cleaners. Passengers are being readied to board our plane, a new crew is walking through the airport, and people are rushing through traffic to meet the passengers.

The land rushes up to meet us, and we touch down. The engines roar in reverse, and the brakes are applied swiftly.

As we are welcomed by the cabin crew to our destination, and we arrive gently at the stand, the feeling of calmness and peacefulness passes, and we are suddenly motivated to start thinking of what we have to do now. Quickly people turn on their mobile phones which bleep loudly with new text messages, and people carelessly grab their bags from above their seats. Politeness now turns into selfishness.

Only thirty minutes ago, people were apologising as they passed each other in the aisle, now they now have no time to let other people out of their seats. They rush off the plane walking quickly and purposefully towards the baggage carousel, passports at the ready, jostling for position, engaged on loud conversations on their mobile phones. They grab their bags and leave the airport, on their way home, to a funeral, to seal a business deal, to lie in the sun, or go to war.

But for a short time up there, they weren’t businessmen, criminals, tourists, or politicians; they were just human beings, travelling in two hundred tons of metal and fuel, six miles above the earth, where status and position counted for nothing; where rank, seniority, and wealth were of no importance.

I would like you all to just think about this for a moment and try to imagine carrying the feeling of flying with you as you travel through life. Where all you believe you are, has no significance. You fight your way through life with your ambitions and your desire for power and position, but ask yourselves this: “Why am I fighting? What good does it do me and the planet I inhabit?”

When you leave the ground, you leave it all behind, and the same happens when you die. You leave it all behind. In the unlikely event that your plane crashes you face the ultimate reality that you are no one, that everything you have strived for has no point.

I often wonder what all the people on board a plane that comes plummeting to earth think about in their final moments of life. Do they worry about the size of their bank accounts or their position in society? I seriously doubt it.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Many will pray to god to spare their life, or ask to be forgiven for things they have done, or think about not seeing their loved ones again, but their sports car or holiday house will be the last thing they think about, I can guarantee it. So let's try to live each day well, being kind to each other, living in the moment, and enjoying every minute here. You never know which day will be your last. I am not trying to frighten any of you, just to get you to wake up to that which you really are.

It doesn't matter if you fly first class or economy; if the plane crashes you die the same way. Try to remember that when you think about your status, or lack of it in the world. All humans are equal on this earth. Maybe not financially, but the rich man and the poor man breathe their final breath exactly the same way.

[Back to Index](#)

Focus

1. *The concentration of attention or energy on something*
2. *Maximum clarity or distinctness of an idea*

You know what focus is, you have it on your camera. It allows an image to become clear in the lens. Your mind is exactly the same; it can only focus on one thing at a time. You may have lots of things going on, but in the moment, it is just one thing that comes into clarity. One thing that shines in the mind above all others.

What I want to discuss with you here is not the event of focus, but what we focus on. For every action in the world there has to be some focus before the action. Whether it be hateful, loving, violent, destructive, or creative. Focus is like a laser beam, it brings one thing into the spotlight.

In other chapters we have discussed compassion, love, and empathy, three words which I think underpin what it is to be truly human. Three words that allow us to enter into the feelings of others (human or animal), have a deep awareness of the suffering of others, and show a positive regard for others. When we focus on these things, we turn our mind into a force for positivity that affects the whole world. On the other hand, focus can be used to hurt, kill, control, and dominate animals, enslave humans, cheat, and develop greed.

In simple terms, focus can be used as a positive or negative force, and the results of this can be seen permeating throughout the globe. In some areas you can see terror and murder, and in others, people trying to help others live a better life through better water, more plentiful food, and education. So what makes us focus on the destructive things? Is it because we were brought up in a violent family and weren't shown any love? Or brought up in a family that concentrated on success and the acquisition of wealth?

There could be many reasons, some of which inevitably have been brought with you as baggage from your childhood, but to me, the lack of clarity which makes us focus on the negative things is merely a lack of awareness. Awareness of self in action, Awareness of others. Awareness of the effect we have on others. When we become more aware, our focus starts to shift automatically, leading to the deep understanding of the three words.

All too often our focus wanders back to the self. Self-interest, self-indulgence, self-pity. So how do we get this focus? Do we really want it anyway? Isn't our life good enough without it?

"Who are you to tell me what to focus on?"

And of course you don't have to focus on love, compassion, and empathy; who am I to tell you to do such a thing! You are an individual, free to make your own choices in life. It's entirely up to you what you do. If you want to focus on making as much money as you possibly can, or exploiting others, then that is what you should do. If you want to focus on terrorising and killing people, then that is what you should do. If you want to focus on stealing from people then that is what you should do. But remember it is now your personal choice to do so. You are not being forced to behave in this way.

You may have had a terrible upbringing which has contributed to who you are today. But now you must be prepared to take the responsibility for your actions. You are the one who is focussing on these things. No one is to blame. It is your responsibility to accept it.

Remember, you and I belong to the most intelligent species on the planet, and you are free in your mind to focus, and therefore act, on any activity you desire, whether it is of negative or positive consequence to the rest of us. I just ask that you are aware you are making this choice of your own volition.

If you can only focus on one thing at a time...
Why not make it a positive thing?

With that out of the way, maybe we can move on to look at the positive aspects of focus (sorry to keep repeating the word). What benefits can come about by focussing on love, compassion, and empathy? Well there's no better place to start than the self!

Self-love may seem like vanity, and maybe just a little narcissistic for you, but if you can't love yourself, how can you start to love others? I am not talking about being conceited or admiring yourself in the mirror every day, this is about acceptance of self – acceptance that you are a wonderful human being, whatever you believe your faults are, and that you are capable of being loving towards every other human being on the planet. True acceptance of this is the start.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

It doesn't matter if you have been a murderer, warmonger, drug dealer, criminal, liar, or con man. You are not everything you have done. You may have created negative effects for people in the past, but whilst air still flows into your lungs, and your heart still beats in your chest, you can refocus on the positive, and turn the spotlight on love – love of yourself.

From this love of self, emanates a radiant glow around you, no longer are you trapped in a prison of negativity, you have refocused on love. You have let negativity slide away from you in one big shift.

The second step involves no effort either, but just allowing yourself to focus on someone else for a moment, for example your family around you (whether it be wife, husband, brother, sister, son, daughter, mother, or father), and let the radiant glow that is love reach out to them.

They are the closest ones to you. Whether you hate them, disagree with them, or argue with them you can still love them. You don't have to force it. Just embrace them and tell them "I love you," that is all. "I love you." If it seems difficult to you, just imagine you are saying it in your mind before you do it. I love you signifies a feeling so strong it contains no judgement nor criticism. "I love you."

Once you have said it, become aware of your feelings. Try to notice what you are thinking. Then try to think what the person you have said it to is feeling. What do you imagine they feel? Do you think it is positive or negative? Try to understand how they may have been feeling if you hurt them in the past. Try to feel how they may have been feeling when someone they loved hurt them. What a dagger that strikes you when you are hurt by someone you love. Try to feel it now, without feeling pity for yourself for causing hurt, reach out with the radiant love to them and enclose them in it. The golden glow of love. You are focussing on empathy.

Step three. Refocus.

See this is easy isn't it? Think about the people you have hurt on your way in the world for a moment. Try to understand how they suffered when you hurt them. What was their suffering like? How did you feel when you were hurting them with your words and your actions? Can you see their faces? Can you see your face? How did you look? How did they look? When you are ready bring that suffering into focus and hold it there, shine a torch on it, pinpoint it with a laser beam. Don't let it out of your mind until you can feel it. Now let it go.

Let the negativity slide away once again and refocus on the golden image of love emanating from your body and embrace the suffering of the others you have hurt. Embrace their suffering and wrap it in your golden blanket of love.

Never again will you let your mind wander and focus on negativity, you are compassion, you do not want to hurt people you want to help them. It is in your true nature to help others not hurt them. You feel their suffering and you want to do something to alleviate it. You do not want to cause suffering any more. You are focussing on compassion.

Maybe you do want to cause suffering. Maybe you want to hurt people. Maybe you don't know you are hurting people, maybe you don't care, maybe you are just too busy to notice! Maybe hurting people is inevitable in your line of work. Maybe, maybe, maybe...

I would ask you one thing though, and that is to be upfront with people. You see, it is so hurtful when people are deceived into thinking you are loving, empathic, and compassionate, when you are not. It is so much better for you and for the rest of the world if you just come out and say it.

*I don't care if I hurt people, I don't care about anybody
I am focussing on myself*

For me personally, if I am going to dedicate my energy to something, I want it to be positive. I want to help other people, so I focus on the three key words.

It doesn't mean I am not thinking about other things. It just means that when I have a thought or perform an action, I shine my torch on that thought with the test of is it loving, compassionate, or empathic? It doesn't take more than a micro-second to do. It isn't difficult, and doesn't require effort. Just awareness.

When I apply the test to myself, I don't have to stop and think, it is almost a transparent effect. The thought just passes through my mind without interaction and judgement, and is only halted when it comes into conflict with the three key words. It works for me.

Do something positive for yourself and the world right now. Shine a spotlight on your thoughts. Light

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

them up and refocus. Why waste time on negative thoughts and actions. Where do they get you in the end?

You only have a short time on earth, why fill it with negative stress, when you could feel love, compassion, and empathy your whole life? My life is different since refocusing. You don't have anything to lose. If you don't feel better, then you can always go back to your old ways! It's that easy.

[Back to Index](#)

Follow

1. *To travel behind, go after, come after*
2. *Travel along a certain course*
3. *Act in accordance with someone's rules, commands, or wishes*

Have you ever noticed that we are all followers? We are followers of fashion, religion, regimes, or ideologies, amongst others. What I want to discuss with you in this topic is the lack of independence we have, and why we are happy to just follow somebody, anybody. Where is our individuality, and in particular where is our individuality of mind?

What I would like you to do is to start to reflect on your possessions. Look around you now. Look at the clothes you are wearing. Sure, you may have bought them with your own money; you may even have carefully selected them from the hundreds of retail establishments and thousands of product lines available; but remember, someone else designed them, set the “trends” for the season, and spent a huge amount of money marketing them, so you believe you freely chose to look a certain way.

You may also be wearing something because your company/religion/culture dictates you wear it, and you may also even believe it was your own free will that made you choose to wear it, but I would like you to think about this very, very, carefully. It is of the utmost importance that you become aware of what you are wearing, and why you are wearing it. Listen to your thoughts, to the justifications your mind is giving you for dressing the way you do. With that in mind, let’s move into the home. Some of you reading this (in countries where mass consumerism hasn’t taken hold due to financial limitations), may find yourselves aware, that although you don’t have these things, you want them.

Look at your car, your television, your mobile phone, your satellite navigation system, your music system, your internet connection, your house, your garden (if you have one), your hobbies, your habits, your job, your aspirations, your desires, your likes, your dislikes, your political persuasion, your sexual habits, your religious views.

Please think carefully about why you buy, what you buy, why you say what you say, why you do what you do, and if you look closely enough, you may find you are not independent at all, but a mere follower. It may hurt to read me saying that you are in fact a follower of everything, but think about it carefully. Someone else is doing it and I like it, so I’m going to do it as well.

Someone has planted a seed, and given enough water, that seed has developed. The seed may have come from an advertising agency; from a politician; from a religious leader; from your parents; from your husband or wife, or your peer group. All of them know that in your deep desire to be accepted, you will follow; after all, it takes true courage (*a quality of spirit that enables you to face danger or pain without showing fear*) to stand alone, and most of us are too afraid to take that step. I can understand why.

Why should you choose to make your life difficult when the path of least resistance – the easiest way – beckons? I can hear most of you saying:

“What’s the problem of buying clothes! I’m not a fashion designer, nor am I an electronics engineer, so I need someone to design my clothes, and build my computer, there’s nothing wrong with it.”

And on the surface, I would agree with you. But you see, the problem lies, not with the tv, or the clothes, but with the thinking; for it is the same following that has enabled dictators to enlist the support of the people, and embark on killing millions of humans.

You can never blame the leaders. Sure, they might have the idea, but it takes more than just one man to start a war. It is you and I who actively or passively follow, who are accountable. So, although the purchase of a new mobile phone (because you’ve got to have one), or a new car (because the new one is more eco-friendly), or the wearing of a new type of hat (because everyone’s doing it), or listening to the latest pop tune (because the band is so cool), may seem like it has nothing to do with genocide or religious fanaticism – but think again.

Leaders, whether they be commercial, religious, or political need followers. *Without you they are no one.* They are just a bag of bones, connective tissue, and muscles with an idea. Please try to see this.

***I will follow you whatever you say,
whatever you do...***

So when you next think about buying a new ipod or digital camera, or engaging in ethnic cleansing or “holy war,” become aware of your thoughts. Question why you think the way you do. Where did the thought originate? Did it just appear out of the blue, like magic, or did the thought come to you another way? Perhaps

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

through the tv, advertising, friends, colleagues, politicians, or religious leaders for example.

Try to stop before you allow the seed to take hold; the non-independent mind is easily persuaded by talk that appeals to your ego, to your desires, to anything that will make you feel important or superior to others, to anything that will make you feel secure, safe in the knowledge that you do not have to think for yourself. All thought has been already taken care of.

To me, it seems natural that we blindly follow others, after all, we are brought into a world where fear is universal, and independent thought is actively discouraged. Sure, you have choices – what colour curtains to buy, what party to vote for, what tv to buy, what job to do – but they are choices within clear boundaries. As long as you pick one of the choices offered to you, you'll be ok.

But what if you don't want to choose any of them? What if you want to stand alone? I have found that the more you reject the choices available, the more you start to stand on the outside of "society," where people begin to shun you for being an independent thinker. When I have talked to my old friends about the path I have chosen they find it hard to understand. How could someone who liked fast food, fast cars, spending money, and buying all the latest gadgets have rejected it all, and is now embarking on a journey to discover himself, and try to help other people discover themselves!

It's all too much for them to comprehend, so they have gradually distanced themselves from me. My dad actually said I was becoming a social leper (*a pariah who is avoided by others*)! But for me, the further I get from the conditioned mind, the freer I feel.

For those of you who choose a similar path, I offer these words. It isn't easy, but nothing worthwhile ever is. You may lose your friends. Your family may reject you. Society may reject you, and you may feel as if it's a waste of time putting yourself through unnecessary suffering; but as the process begins, you will notice a change in yourself. You will notice that the less you follow other people's thought, the more free your mind becomes.

I cannot promise that this will make you happy, but then happiness is a choice you have to make, just like buying a new car. The one thing to remember is that not being a follower does not make you a leader, but then look where all the "leaders" in the world have got us.

The independent mind
Free and limitless

[Back to Index](#)

Freedom

1. *The condition of being free; the power to act or speak or think without externally imposed restraints*

Who gives us our freedom? The king, the president, the generals? What about democracy, god, or our parents? We often hear people talking about wanting their “freedom – not people incarcerated for crimes, but people psychologically imprisoned by their leaders. People who – for fear of imprisonment or death – cannot speak or act freely.

The freedom to think has never been able to be controlled, but I’m sure some governments would like to be able to do it; it would certainly make their job of controlling the citizens easier. So although people can think, and the government cannot hear them, how frustrating must it be to be able to think freely but unable to speak or act freely?

*“The ideology of my government is wrong,
they are killing their own people who speak out against them.
They want us to worship them, but I hate everything they stand for.
They want me to inform on my family, if they speak out against them.
I want to tell someone it is wrong,
but I fear for my life,
so I put up with it, and am tortured in my silence.”*

Freedom – in the dictionary sense – is not your right, but something “given” to you, almost as a favour; a display that the government is generous towards the citizens of the country. It means you have the freedom to determine your own life, the power to act, speak and think without interference from the government. Oh, I forgot, that is, until you say, or do something that is against them.

I am not talking about committing a crime, such as stealing or murder, I’m talking about a crime with no victim. The crime, if that’s what you can call it, is speaking out against your own government. This is when you find that your “freedom” was actually only on loan to you, as long as you conformed to what was expected of you. It is almost like an unwritten agreement – your freedom, for your cooperation with the government. Break the agreement, and you may find your freedom being revoked, and a charge of treason laid at your door.

Treason

1. *A crime that undermines the offender’s government*
2. *Disloyalty by virtue of subversive behaviour*
3. *An act of deliberate betrayal*

Many people have tried to bring down corrupt governments, or cruel and inhumane regimes, only to find themselves summarily executed, or spending a life sentence in a hard labour camp. In a democracy this wouldn’t happen, they say, but try any of the above treasonable offences and see how caring and understanding your government is.

What I want to understand is, how can a group of individuals want to control what other people think, do, and say? Well, let’s try to understand a government’s job shall we (even in an undemocratic country). In short, it is to raise taxes from the people, and provide essential services like health, education, infrastructure (roads/electricity), and to protect their citizens from harm. That is all. If you’re lucky, they may use some of your tax to set up a social welfare system, which aims to help the needy.

Employers provide jobs that pay the workers, enabling them to pay for shelter, foodstuffs, and anything else they wish to buy with their hard earned money. The problem starts when – instead of being in government to help the citizens – the government starts to exist for its own sake. In a word, the leaders have tasted a very human emotion, and are not going to let go of it.

Power

1. Possession of controlling influence

And why would they? It's nice to be powerful! It feels good. It gives you a sense of being someone, not *just* an average man. You have armies at your disposal, you can order mass destruction at the touch of a button, you can have people killed that get in the way of your plans. Power. That's what destroys freedom.

People with power start to think they are more than human; they begin to see themselves apart from the rest of the people. They begin to rule from above; exercising their will, without any thought to anyone else. Their power must be absolute as they are now addicted to it, and they aren't going to give it up without a fight.

Ideology has nothing to do with it. Can you see? It doesn't matter if they are communist, conservative, socialist or liberal, they have one thing in common, they have power. You control what people say or do, but you also want them to love you – such is the destructiveness of power – so you grant them their freedom. The generous, benevolent leader, bestowing the ultimate gift on “his” people. Freedom...

Do you think you have freedom; are you free? Who *gave* you freedom? You see, for the word freedom to exist, there must be a controlling power who issues it. If everyone really could act, speak or think, without externally imposed restraints, there would be no need for the word, would there?

Freedom to act, speak or think, without externally imposed restraints, is only possible if you speak, act or think within the boundaries set by the controlling power. Even if it is a democratic power.

In case you were wondering, this does not only apply to governments. Parents do it by limiting what you do “for your own good.”

“You're not going out tonight,” “you're not seeing that boy again,” “you're grounded for a week for not doing your homework,” “you're not watching that tv show.”

They also try to limit what you say, because they find it offensive, or not in line with their values.

But it all changes when you get near the age of adulthood. They show you their magnanimous side, by saying “Your mother and I have discussed it, and we think we're going to let you have a bit more freedom, now you're getting older.” Thanks very much, that's generous of you to allow me my freedom!

It seems to be, that once you are given a position of trust to care for someone (government caring for the people/parent caring for the child), you soon find out that actually what you have is power over another individual; and people with power soon find they are being corrupted by it. Why? Because they like the feeling. It raises their self-esteem, and any inadequacies they may have felt dissolve. They have the power of life and death over people; they feel like a god.

*I was free when I was born
I'll be free when I die
If only I could see through fear
I'd be free whilst I'm alive*

The only way to true freedom is through the understanding of fear. Why? Well, because it is natural to experience fear when someone is exerting great power over you. You know you must conform, or they have the power to take away your “freedom.”

We belong to the most intelligent species on the planet – one marked by superior intelligence and articulate speech – but what's the point of all this intelligence and complex language if we can't use it?

People in power will tell you that you are “free” to do, say, and think what you like, and that's nice of them, but if someone tells me I am free, I know that in truth I am not. I am only free as long as I do not confront the person in power, so I am afraid to say, or do what I want, in case I offend them.

When I am no longer afraid, I am free. People in power can no longer control a man who is not afraid, their power starts to slip, and eventually they lose their power.

We will go into fear in a separate topic, but for now, think what you are most afraid of, and imagine if you said or did something against someone in power. What is the worst thing they can do to you? Even as a young person, your parents can't really do that much to you. Maybe ban you from going out for a month, or revoke some privileges, which is bad at the time, and enough to keep you afraid of losing them in the future.

But what about as an adult? What is the worst thing you can imagine happening if you spoke out against the people in power?

For me, it would have to be the torture and murder of my family, because I love them, and I wouldn't want anything bad to happen to them. You would think that my death would be my greatest fear, that they would kill me, but death is final, there is no more pain. Death is not something to be afraid of, it is a natural process that will happen to all of us one day, but to do something to my family, that is a different matter!

That is why people in power – the world over – will always use something you love, as an instrument of fear. They know you love your family, and to take them away would be the worst thing they could do to you, save kill you. This is control. This is when you know you are not free. You must conform.

Of course, in advanced democracies, this control is rather more loose than in certain dictatorships around the world, but it still exists, otherwise there would be no such word as "treason."

Freedom from fear = True freedom

Power is, in truth, emotional emptiness, or a lack of love in your life; and it is an empty man who tries to control another through fear. Think about it. Whether you are a dictator, president, general, parent, director, manager, or supervisor – it goes right down the chain of command; You are trying to make yourself feel better by making someone else feel worse!

People are afraid of you, and you feel better, so you must keep controlling what they say or do in order to sustain the feeling. This control is called power, which is addiction, which is pleasure. And as we know from our other discussions, when the brain tastes pleasure, it isn't going to give it up without a fight. Likewise, the person in power isn't going to give up their position without a fight.

Help for the addicted:

The only way to free yourself from this addiction is to understand why you enjoy having control over other people. Even if you say it is your job, power is an addiction, which is pleasure. The world was not created so that one man has power over others.

We are all humans together, we all have a role to play here on earth, through cooperation. We are all born the same, we look the same without clothes, and we all die the same.

The dominance and control of others through fear is not the sign of a compassionate man, nor the sign of one who loves. It is the sign of power, addiction, and control, surely not things you wanted when you were born. When you let love back into your life, when you feel empathy and compassion for all other human beings, when you stop thinking about you, the need for dominance and control over others disappears. It's that simple.

You don't *need* to control other people to make yourself feel good; you *need* to build up your own self-esteem, so you feel good about *you* – not just when you have power over others. Maybe you should start a self-help support group for people addicted to "power and control over others," and maybe then, we really will be able to remove the word freedom from the dictionary, for there would truly be no need for it anymore.

[Back to Index](#)

Friendship

1. *A person you know well and regard with affection and trust*
2. *An associate who provides assistance*
3. *A person with whom you are acquainted*

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

I offer all of you my hand in friendship

The dictionary definitions are all a little bit narrow for my liking. They seem to suggest that only people you know well should be called friends; or they suggest someone who helps you when you are in some difficulty is a friend. I also noticed that the antonym of friend is foe (*enemy*). So is the dictionary suggesting that someone I am not acquainted with, do not know well and regard with affection and trust, or someone who does not provide me with assistance, is my enemy! Surely this can't be right. Just because we don't know someone yet doesn't make them our enemy, it just makes them a friend we have yet to meet. There, that sounds better than enemy, doesn't it? So with that cleared up let us begin our discussion.

The friendship pyramid

Country leaders often turn to their friends during times of crisis, don't they? They've got themselves into a bit of bother so they call on some "friend" who happens to share the same religion or economic viewpoint, skin colour or language, and asks for some help (usually military or financial, and as we know, friends help each other out. When they ask for help, they receive it. "That's what friends are for."

Moving down the chain a little, some people have "friends in high places," a euphemism for saying a person in power who is able to be manipulated, and when they need a favour, they call up their friend and get whatever it is "fixed," (e.g. a parking ticket torn up, or plans for a new casino in a residential area passed). Isn't it nice to have friends?

Lower down the pecking order, there are people we know from the community, perhaps someone from the pub who can take a look at your leaky pipes, for "just a couple of drinks!" And finally we have the personal friends. But then these too go in order.

There are "friends you know to say hello to in the street;" "friends you know from work and may go out with socially a couple of times;" then the regular people you meet up with every week, followed by the second best friend and finally the first best friend – the person who you confide your darkest secrets to, and usually the ones that run off with your other half and don't pay back money they borrowed (sorry, that's a little harsh)! I haven't included parents in this list because you don't choose them, you're just kind of stuck with them, and anyway you love them, you're not just friends with them, right?

So as we reach the bottom of our pyramid, we can see that there are many types of friendships going on. From the "I have some problem I need fixed friend," to the "personal confidant friend" you need nothing from, but are just happy to share their company.

Friends are nice

It's nice to have friends isn't it? People you can phone up, share your daily worries with, pop round to their houses and they to yours, go on holiday together, and chat and chat and chat. Everyone needs friends. But why? Well, for starters, we would be pretty lonely on our own, and second, it's nice to have someone else you can chat to apart from your other half (they don't understand you), and anyway, Man is a social animal, he needs lots of different stimulation and conversation, and friends are the ideal people to do stuff with. They like the same things you do, they like going to the same places and they like talking about the same things. All in all, it's a perfect set up.

Without people to stimulate us and share our daily troubles we'd be a pretty sorry lot, moping around all day with no one to talk to. Work colleagues won't crack it, we need someone we can trust, someone who knows what it's like to be *you*, and can empathise with how *you* are feeling and vice versa. Those of us who don't have this kind of friend tend to become insular and start to hide their feelings, which isn't good for anyone, no sir! So we all need to get ourselves some close friends and the world will be perfect. Ok? The end.

But hang on, how do we find these friends? The world is becoming a hard place to meet people. Everyone is so busy; they all seem to have enough friends already thank you very much and don't need any more, as I have found out over the last few years. And the older you get the harder it gets. People are married, they have their own lives now; they have families and they want to hang around with other families (you know the

mothers who only hang around with other mothers).

So we join sports clubs, and other activity clubs, hoping to meet that special friend we have never had. But lots of people already have a best friend from their schooldays, so how are you going to find a best friend? Maybe you could set up a website for people who don't have best friends (hey, not a bad idea). Ultimately, it is down to luck and good chemistry whether or not you hit it off with someone and become everlasting friends.

But even when you do have those friends, you can still blow it, by sleeping with their partner, saying something that offends them, or borrowing money. I'm not sure which is worst, but I'm sure you'll all have your own idea. So, you should now have someone to confide in; someone to trust; and someone to be there for you. And that is a hard thing to find. I assure you.

The stranger

Maybe you hadn't noticed, but in the cities and towns these days, everyone is a stranger. Everyone is a potential enemy; you don't know who to trust, you don't know who you can confide in, and so you are always on your guard.

You move quickly from place to place to meet your "real" friends or colleagues, and purposefully avert your eyes in case anyone talks to you. "Excuse me, can I just ask you a question?" pleads the underpaid, underloved charity campaigner desperately trying to get you to sign up to help the whales, the elderly, or the dying etc. and you move even quicker, side stepping them, and nearly knocking an old lady over in the process.

This as you may have guessed, is me I'm describing.

I have always hated talking to people I don't know, although my mum is a practised genius at managing to talk to at least half a dozen people she doesn't know in the street or in the shops.

"Mum!" I used to shout, all embarrassed. "Why do you keep talking to people you don't know, it's really, really embarrassing!"

"Why?" always asked my mum, "and anyway, they talk to me, not the other way round."

"But you don't even know them" I used to plead, as I was dragging her away by force. "You're sooo embarrassing."

But recently, I noticed that neither she nor the person she was speaking to seemed embarrassed, in fact they seemed to be enjoying the chat. My embarrassment, it seems, is utterly misplaced. I questioned who I was feeling uncomfortable for. Was it for me, my mum or the person who was accosted by her in the shop? I realised I was predicting what the other person must be thinking, "Oh no, a mad woman has stopped to talk to me in the street! I must run away quickly!"

And that's it isn't it? We have lost the art of conversation. We think anyone who talks to us who is not our friend must either be mad. "Hello, I'm the king of egypt," said one man who approached me recently, or after something:

"Scuse me mate, Scuse me... Err you 'aven't got a quid I could borrow 'ave ya?"

To which I always wanted to reply:

"Sure, when were you planning on giving it back to me?"

Recently I saw a strangely dressed man walk up to a young couple and put out his hand. "Do you live here?" he said, and I didn't hear the rest of the conversation, but as I turned back to look, I could feel the young man getting embarrassed by the poor man who was still busily shaking his hand. And I could feel myself thinking "I'm glad he didn't stop me and shake my hand, that would have been awful." But the only awful thing about it is that we (I) go out of our way to avoid people who are not on our list.

We have all become so insular that we cannot speak to anyone. How would we start a conversation? Would they think we were mad, or perhaps trying to chat them up? Perhaps they might think we plan to steal their wallet, or follow them home and rape and murder them. Oh well, it's best not to think about it, so we go back to standing on our own.

Many years ago, I used to catch a commuter bus into london, and one thing I noticed was that the same people were standing at the bus stop every day, and never once, did anyone utter a word to anyone else; people who would spend two to three hours of their lives every day with these same people. I just couldn't

understand it.

These weren't strangers, these were people they recognised, people who sat next to them on the bus; but each and every day they would walk in silence to the bus, sit down, read their papers, or fall asleep without so much as a hello to the other passengers. *That* might start a conversation, and we wouldn't want that, would we?

Six billion potential friends and counting

So, has Man always been such a coward when it comes to chatting with people he doesn't know? Has he always had a deep seated fear of the unknown enemy; always on his guard in case of attack? Well, up until the last few hundred years, society was ordered very differently. There were no mega-cities and most people lived in smaller communities where most people knew each other. Sure they would gossip about each other, but they would also just stand and talk airing any problems they had, sharing in the village news.

But it's not like that now, is it? Nine million people in a city and you know, what, maybe one or two well, and have maybe thirty or so acquaintances and not so close friends. That's a heck of a lot of people we don't know isn't it? No wonder we are scared of strangers!

You see, the modern economic society is all about the individual, isn't it? My job. My money. My car. My house. My friends. My family. And we are taught that that is the way it should be. "You keep your head down in the city and nothing bad will happen to you," they say.

So every day, you jostle for a seat on the train, metro, or bus, with people you don't know, and you avert your eyes from theirs in case (a) they think you're looking at them "funny" and stab you, or (b) think you're a pervert for eyeing up the women.

And *never* look at children, because the parents might think you are a paedophile and report you to the police, and if you smile at a child, that is proof positive that you are a paedophile, and the father might get aggressive, and you don't want that, so... It may be better just to drive in, just in case any of the above happens!

How do we engage again?

So, we can see from our dialogue that we are on pretty shaky ground if we ever thought about starting a conversation with anyone we don't know in a city or town. "Normal people don't talk to strangers, remember! Leave the talking to strangers bit to the mentally deranged and the homeless alcoholic beggars," your friend wisely councils. And maybe we should, after all, what would we talk about? The weather?

Maybe it's going to take a bit of intervention to get this whole thing going again, because I think, that left to your own devices, you will probably carry on with your "eyes averted, side stepping charity collectors walk," I regularly practised. But this is going to take careful management; we don't want to freak everyone out when we start talking to them. So what I propose is a conversation corner! What a scary thought.

"The conversation corner"

Now look, I'm not talking about anything fancy here, I'm talking about setting up several permanent tables and chairs with some kind of weather protection on the top. A sign that says "Conversation corner, get your conversation here," or something catchier than that perhaps! If you sat down and someone sat next to you, you would have to talk. A scary thought I grant you.

But what if we set up these conversation corners right in the centre of the city, and had as many of them as we have fast food outlets, and coffee shops? What do you think? Do you like the idea now we have kind of formalised the talking to strangers bit? It makes it a bit less confronting than just walking up to someone who is obviously in a hurry and obviously doesn't want to talk to anyone. Now if you want to talk to him or he wants to talk to you, you could meet up under the bright red "conversation corner" sign. So who wants to start it? You or me? Ok, I'll see what I can do...

Stop being so insular

We may have enough friends to confide in, we may not need any more, and our life may be complete; but for the sake of humanity, we have to stop enclosing ourselves in our little “friend” bubbles, whether that friend be at the national, or personal level.

We have to start breaking down the barriers, not putting up new ones that say “these are my friends, these are the people I will talk to because they are like me.” We need to have conversations with everybody.

Imagine a muslim and a christian sitting down at one of our new conversation corners, just having a chat.

Break down the barriers and see that we are all people; that we can be friends with everyone. And when I say friends, I am not suggesting we regularly attempt to socialise with millions of people. We can have our close confidants, and our extended group of acquaintances, but there are millions of people in our cities whom we could call our friends, even if we only meet them once at conversation corner. They could be a drug dealer, a city dealer, or a car dealer, it doesn't matter; what matters is that there is one less stranger in our city; and that, my friends, can only be a good thing.

Connect.

[Back to Index](#)

Fun

- 1. Activities that are enjoyable or amusing*
- 2. Verbal wit or mockery (often at another's expense but not to be taken seriously)*
- 3. A disposition to find (or make) causes for amusement*

When you think of fun, what comes to mind? Maybe a few drinks at the pub, going to a party, doing something exciting, or going on holiday? Of course you need to have fun; you have a stressful life, children, a mortgage, no money, relationship problems. You deserve a little fun in life.

When you are a child, what does fun mean? Happily running round in circles, playing with boxes, chasing the dog, painting our faces. This is fun! Everyone encourages you! Climbing trees, laughing with friends, riding our bikes, without a care in the world... Then we grow up, and become adults.

Now, no one encourages you to climb a tree, ride your bike, splash in the stream or swim in the lake. Unless of course, you are on a scheduled holiday from work that is. Then it's acceptable.

You're an adult now, face up to your responsibilities. Become more serious. After all, life is a serious business! Get a job, get married, get a mortgage, get children, get a better job, get a bigger mortgage, get more children.

Wait a minute, what's this about? We all know we have to eat, and have somewhere to live. We also know we are biologically programmed to seek out a mate and have children, to ensure the human race doesn't die out. That's pretty clear isn't it? We all know we have to work to earn some money, as that is how we pay for food, accommodation, clothing, holidays, children, etc... But who told you to be serious?

Serious

1. Concerned with work or important matters rather than play or trivialities

In your work, you sometimes have to be serious, but by that, I mean concentrate; pay attention to what you are doing. If you are a welder, an airline pilot, a scaffolder, a typist, or a deal maker, it makes perfect sense for you to be "serious" whilst you are involved in that activity, otherwise the job would not be done safely, correctly, or to anyone's satisfaction.

But this is a different type of seriousness, the type that comes from inside, the seriousness which is not concentration or attention to detail. This is sadness. Look around you in the office, or your place of work. Look at your colleagues faces. What do you see? Do you see happiness/joy in what they are doing? Do they look like they are *enjoying* themselves?

"Hold it," I hear some of you say "work is not a place to enjoy yourself; you enjoy yourself in your own time, not in the company's time."

But this *is* your time, your very, very, short time on this planet – 80 or 90 years for the lucky ones. And out of that time, how much time do you spend working? Well, if you live in a country with an education system and retirement plan, you may leave school at 18 and work until 65 (otherwise you would find yourself working almost your whole life till you die, if you have no money) that's 47 years. 47 years! So let's look at your life span:

0 – 5: Just fun

6 – 12: Fun plus school

12 – 18: Fun decreasing, seriousness increasing (must study *hard*)

18 – 65: Work

65 – 80: Retired, coping with the onset of old age. Die. The end.

Now that might seem a bit morbid for a topic entitled "Fun," but I just want to show you that the majority of your life will be spent at work. At least 8 hours per day, plus travel time. Nearly half of the 24 hour day. Oh, I forgot to mention, you'll need to take approximately 7 to 8 hours off for sleeping too, leaving you with a grand total of about 5 hours for *you*! Oh yes, you'll need to eat as well, have a shower, look after the children, pay some bills...

It's no wonder people are heading off for a drink to relax! They haven't got time for anything else. Climbing trees, riding your bike? No chance! Maybe a quick drink, cinema, or something to eat and straight to bed, is all most people can manage at the end of the working day. You haven't got time for anything else. Work is taking up all of your time.

“But everyone needs to work” you say. “How would we eat, pay the mortgage...”

But that’s not what we are talking about here. What we are discussing, is that when you are an adult, you are expected to be serious. The company expects you to be serious, your parents expect you to be serious: “When will you ever grow up?” The whole of society wants you to be serious. Everyone expects something from you. You must provide, you must have ambition, you must have a good car, you’re children must go to the best school. You must conform. You must be serious; you must take your responsibilities seriously.

Adults must be serious!

But this is *your* life, right? A short life you have here on earth. Who is to tell you to be serious? Go on, act like a child, laugh when it’s inappropriate, make silly faces, smile all the time! But you can’t, can you? Because life is serious, your boss would fire you, people would ridicule you as a “joker,” your parents would again tell you to grow up. Your friends wouldn’t respect you.

I understand it’s hard being an adult, with such high expectations placed on such narrow shoulders, but do me one favour, can you? Tell me that even if you don’t do what you love, you love what you do.

So even if you love horse riding and are not a professional jockey, or you love singing but are not a professional singer, you at least love doing your job every day, whether it’s stamping invoices, working in the mail room, working on the checkouts, delivering pizza, working on the assembly line, reading marketing reports, selling office furniture, removing peoples rubbish, designing computer software, or are even chairman of the board.

If you love what you do, and you can have fun doing it, then the X hours a day, you spend doing it are well worth it indeed. But most people aren’t like that are they? They are doing a job because it’s good money, it’s what they studied to become, or it or has good career prospects. They are doing it because the company has a good pension plan, they can’t get anything else, or it’s just a stop gap until they find what they really want to do.

That’s why I ask you to look around you, and look at people’s faces. Look around you in the streets at all the people shopping. Do they look like they’re having fun? Do you look like your having fun? Or are you just existing in the world, doing your duty as an adult, paying your bills, going to work every day for a company whose idea of fun is “jeans and hawaiian shirt friday,” or “team building days,” “social evenings,” and “office parties.”

Companies know you spend most of your life giving your time and energy to help them make more money, and know that most of you probably only turn up every day because you need the money. So every once in a while, they make you feel better by providing “fun” days, where everyone can relax and let their hair down. Christmas parties, summer barbecues.

Just don’t have too much fun, otherwise people will be talking about you on monday, and don’t have fun at work unless the boss says it’s ok. Work *is* a *serious* business, remember that. The company tells you when it’s fun time, not you.

Fun laid on for adults usually means one thing: “Alcohol.” Whether at a company party, social event, down the local pub, out at a nightclub, or dinner at home. It allows us to relax and allows us to have fun. It is adult fun, a prescribed dose of anti-seriousness. Everyone expects you to drink alcohol when you’re an adult!

“I had such a fun evening last night! But I’ve got a real hangover today...”

How many times have you heard that? I’ve certainly said it on numerous occasions. So what we want to know is: can you have fun without alcohol, or is alcohol the fun?

Imagine for a moment you are at a friend’s barbecue, at a company party, or down the pub. Now imagine having four glasses of water instead of wine or beer! How much fun would that be all evening? You may enjoy yourself, but would you be having as much fun drinking water as you would have drinking alcohol? This is a serious problem for all of us, when we only start to have fun when we are detached from reality.

Just look at a child, and tell me he needs to have a drink to have fun

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

We are so busy working and earning money to pay bills, that we have forgotten how to have real fun; and I'm not talking about going on an adventure holiday, or any external entertainment, I am talking about internal fun. The feeling that life is fun, that it's great to be alive. The feeling that you want to smile in the morning, that you enjoy life and everything life throws at you.

The more fun you find in daily life, the more you stop being a slave to seriousness, a false idea, peddled by parents and teachers, that you must grow up, and face up to your responsibilities. Growing up is a process that happens all by itself, and as an adult, these are your primary responsibilities as I see them, whether male or female.

- A. You need to provide food and water for yourself and your family.
- B. You need a house for shelter and warmth.
- C. You need to provide clothing for yourself.
- D. If you have children you must care for them, and educate them (love is not a responsibility).
- E. You need to find a way to pay for the above.

How you do it is up to you, but once you stop conforming to the idea that you must be serious in life, you will feel younger. Laugh out loud, smile, dress how you want, learn a musical instrument, change jobs, learn something new, choose work that allows you to enjoy the day, not a job where it's dark when you get up and dark when you come home. Laugh with friends, find something you love and find a way to get paid for it! Have a party with no alcohol! (that's probably a scary feeling), be happy when you meet people. The list could go on and on... It's up to you!

That feeling of fun inside you costs nothing. It's always been there, just waiting to get out. It's just been suppressed by years of conditioning, the fear of failing to conform. Just because you have a mortgage, a job, a car, and three kids doesn't mean you can't have fun. You just need to reach inside.

Let go of other peoples expectations. Just because you are married with three children doesn't mean you have to carry on hating your job! Once you let fun into your life, new ideas will come to you... Enjoy yourself; you're in the prime of your life, whatever age you are. You know why? Because you are alive, you are a human being.

That you even exist is an amazing feat! Through millions of years of evolution and the love of two people, here you are. A being marked with superior intelligence, and articulate speech. You really are amazing, in fact we all are, and we're only here for a short time. So doesn't it make sense to stop being serious, and celebrate being alive? It's time to have fun, to break down the conditioning, the expectations, the growing up. It's time to have the time of our lives.

When life is fun, anger is superfluous, negative emotions fade away. By letting fun into your life thought loses its grip on us, fear loses its grip, we stop controlling ourselves according to tradition, to culture, to the media, to politicians, to religion. And when we do that we let love into our lives, as the act of fun is love. Love of yourself, your family, your colleagues, your friends. Love of the world. Try it, you might just like it.

Help!

Miserable office worker, 38

Good salary

Hates job

Hates commuting

Hates boss

No social life

Three kids (private school)

One wife (spends too much)

Five credit cards (all up to the limit)

Bored with all of above

Becomes

Anything he wants to be!

[Back to Index](#)

G

Gambling

1. *The act of playing for stakes in the hope of winning (including the payment of a price for a chance to win a prize)*
2. *Money that is risked for possible monetary gain*
3. *A risky act or venture*

*I'll put a little bet on just in case
This one's to win in the second race
But then my horse falls and I start to crumble
Why oh why did I ever gamble*

*Now I've lost the lot
It's hard to explain
I don't how it happened
But I'm broke again*

*But don't you worry
I'll bounce back
Next week casino
250 on black*

For most people, gambling is just a part of modern life, an innocuous hobby, that provides pleasure for millions round the world, provides jobs, and most lotteries give money to well deserving charities. It's only the weak who get addicted. For us, gambling addiction is the image of the poor dishevelled man, trying to win back his whole weeks wages, that he foolishly gambled on a horse.

He just can't seem to get back the winning streak he had last week. He just needs to borrow a little bit more, this one's a dead cert, a guaranteed win, so he borrows the money and of course, the horse is pipped at the post by a 200-1 outsider. If only he'd bet on that horse, all his troubles would be gone, just a few centimetres and he would be living the high life now... Better bet on one more, this losing streak can't stay with him forever, this one will win; it's a dead cert...

But of course, even if your horse does come in, you won't give up gambling. You see, winning and losing are all part of the game. It's a game of chance, and every gambler knows that sometimes you win, and sometimes you lose. Though for some strange reason, they think that if they lose five times in a row, they must be sure of a win coming up; because what are the odds of losing six times in a row?

You can gamble on anything. Horses, dogs, and boxing; or you can go to the casino and play blackjack, poker, spin the roulette wheels, or put your coins in the slot machines. All in the hope of turning that 10 into 20, the 20 into 50, and the 50 into 100. That's the point isn't it? To make more money? Otherwise why gamble? For fun? I don't think so... Gambling is yet another activity that acts on the brains pleasure centres.

**

Have you ever been to a casino? I have. You walk in, and there are so many lights flashing, all green, red and white. There are lots of mirrors; the machines are so shiny, and you start to get excited. Your heart races a little faster, the music is loud, everybody looks glamorous (sound familiar?), you change some money, and you start to play.

Pound after pound, dollar after dollar, you feed the machine, while the wheels spin quickly, just waiting for the right pictures to come up... Then suddenly the machine starts the winning music, the lights flash faster, and out comes your winnings.

Time to leave?

"Oh no, not while I'm on a winning streak;" and off you head to the other machines, and finally to the tables, where you can lose your months salary on one number, or one card hand. It's that quick, I promise you. Of course you could win, many people do, but casinos know that the odds are stacked firmly in their favour; otherwise they'd go out of business in a week.

So some people win, and some people lose, but ultimately, the only real winners are the casinos. They know what gets you excited, they know what makes you spend your money. Why do you think there are so many flashing lights everywhere, they know how to stimulate your pleasure centres and motivate you to action.

I hear some of you now: "It's just a bit of fun, it's a night out, I don't really gamble." And with that, most of you would agree: "Yes, why is he trying to spoil our fun? We work hard" (sound familiar?), "we deserve a little fun!"

And yes, it is fun, because your brain is just loving *all that pleasure*, even when you lose. Because the great thing about gambling, is that you don't just lose, and that's it finished; oh no, you can put some more money in, and next time, you could be a *winner*!

When questioned about problem gamblers, every casino owner will tell you that they don't force people to come into their establishments and spend money – it's all a matter of personal choice. They don't let anyone under the age of 18 in, so all of their customers are considered adults (in law) and able to make their own decisions.

But you and I know why we gamble, don't we? It's exciting! Will it be 24 red, will horse number 6 win, will I have a royal flush in this hand, will my numbers come up in the lottery? It must be exciting otherwise why would we keep coming back for more every time we lose?

Let's go into this together. If I bet 6 numbers every week on the national lottery, and have not won for 5 years why would I keep doing it? Seems a little strange, don't you think? Is it not the promise of untold riches, more money than you could ever dream of; a prize so big, that not only would you never have to work again, but neither would your family? But the interesting thing is, even people who have plenty of money still gamble! So it isn't just the poor man trying to improve his lot in life! The same 6 numbers every week,

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

(at least) and then they introduce a midweek lottery. What if your same 6 numbers come up on the midweek lottery, you could never forgive yourself for failing to buy a ticket, (neither would your family, who are banking on this chance to have a better life.)

Of course, the national lottery is one great way to get the whole country addicted, where the entry fee is low, and the prize is huge! And this kind of gambling is not the same as going to bet on horses, or play blackjack, because none of the money is going to those nasty bookmakers, or casino owners. This is all in a good cause. Most of the money goes to charity, so everybody wins. Or do they?

Have you ever noticed how you *feel* when the balls are spinning round waiting to drop? How do you actually *feel*? Pretty excited, I'd say. The anticipation, the waiting; could it be your ball first? Is it... Yes a 6! and it continues, the excitement grows... the second ball... Number... 24. Yes!! Oh, this could be your lucky week... 4 million pounds! How will you spend it? New cars, a yacht, a helicopter, and a new house in the sun... Number... 12. Ahhh, unlucky you think... Number 41...No! Number... 16. No! And finally... Nummmmberrrrr... 3.

"Oh well, never mind," we say, "maybe next week." And you're right, maybe next week it could be you holding the cheque for £4 million, so dutifully you buy another ticket. Just in case.

The game of chance is not new; people have always gambled, which is to take risks. And why do we take a risk? One word: Excitement, which is pleasure!

The truth is, you will probably never win the lottery, but you may win a few pounds here and there. Your horse may never come in, but you can be sure that someone else's did, so that keeps you gambling – just in case...

Let me ask you a question: Have you ever seen serious gamblers? Have you ever looked at their faces? Do they look like they're having fun? They are so caught up in the addiction, that they have no time to enjoy it. Like someone addicted to drugs, alcohol or cigarettes, they know they're addicted, but they just can't stop. The brain has tasted pleasure, and it won't give it up without a fight.

Action now for the benefit of your system

Do you gamble? Do you like it? Do you enjoy it? Tell me why you really gamble. Is it to make more money? Is it to make a better life for your family? Is it to pay off debts? Or is it just for one simple reason: Pleasure? It makes you happy doesn't it?

Don't you think addiction of any kind is bad for the system? Doesn't it distract and shelter us from real life, helping us escape, momentarily? But "real life" is always there, only addiction enables us to forget it for just a short while. It allows us to get through a day without worrying about our problems, although the problems are still there. It solves nothing but offers you plenty of solutions. Bet on a horse, go to the casino, have a drink, have a cigarette...

Do you not think it is time we learned to deal with problems on our own, and realise that addictions like gambling of any kind are keeping us from finding a solution? This is not about fun. You have been addicted by your brain; tricked into doing something that is not best for the system. If you really want more money, there is only one way to get it. Earn It. Go to work every day and earn more money. Get a better job, or if you want it quicker, rob a bank. Come on, this is not about the money, is it?

***We are addicted to the excitement of placing the bet, the pure pleasure of it all, nothing more.
Receiving the winnings is secondary to the excitement of taking part.***

Follow this logic if you will:

- | | | |
|----|--|--------|
| 1. | Go to work | Boring |
| 2. | Work hard all week | Boring |
| 3. | Earn £5.00 per hour | Boring |
| 4. | Take home £160.00 at the end of the week | Boring |

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

- | | | |
|----|--|----------|
| 5. | Give £20.00 to bookmakers to bet on “old nag in the 3.00 pm” | Exciting |
| 6. | Watch race for 5 minutes | Exciting |
| 7. | Lose £20 | Boring |

This isn't good business sense, is it? Of course you will still argue, “but I could have won!” And there it is, right there, the addiction to the chance you could have won; the small excitement in your week. And maybe next time, number 7 will change to...

Win £100 Exciting

Can you see how pointless this whole cycle of winning and losing is? The highs and lows? What a miserable addiction this is. We will wager everything, just for one moment of excitement, and still the bookmaker stands there ready to help us place our bet; ready to relieve us of our hard earned money. He knows why you're here, and so do you:

Pleasure

It doesn't seem like a problem while you're winning, although the consequences of losing can be serious. Getting into debt, ruining your relationships, or stealing to gamble more. But your addicted brain isn't going to let you give up quite so easily.

In order to be free, you need to be aware of yourself in the moment. The moment you buy a lottery ticket, place a bet on horse, or enter the casino. You need to see why you're there.

You don't have a problem, you are just a slave to the desire for pleasure, something which does not further the system in any positive way. You are there because your brain likes it *so* much, that it is prepared to put your whole life in jeopardy. Your brain is bringing you along for the ride, so it can have a good time at your expense. When you can see this, you will be free.

Look at the problems gambling addiction causes in the world around us. How many addicted people are making their families suffer, their friends suffer and wider society around them suffer, without ever realising what they are doing? And the purveyors of pleasure, the casino owners, the bookmakers, the horse owners, and the lottery license holders, are all complicit in keeping us addicted. They know that once you are hooked you can't stop. Your gambling keeps them in a nice lifestyle, but what about your life?

This is your life, not theirs, and whether you agree or not, gambling one cent of money you have earned hard makes no sense. They know you *must* lose sometime, and when you do lose, that's the time you'll be back to win your money back.

Gambling is just another form of drug addiction.
You do it to get high!

[Back to Index](#)

Gardens

1. *A plot of ground where plants are cultivated*
2. *The flowers or vegetables or fruits or herbs that are cultivated in a garden*
3. *A yard or lawn adjoining a house*

Now, I don't know if you've noticed it, but the available "green" space we get with new house (which we call a "garden"), is diminishing by the day. Behind my mother's house, a large old house was recently knocked down to make way for three "executive" homes. Huge, I grant you; but when I looked over the wall, I failed to see any space we could call a real garden. So I asked the boss of the construction company why that was?

Me: Hi, I like the new houses you've built, but one thing troubles me, where have the gardens gone?

Him: Oh! (chuckling) Yes it's funny you should say that but someone else asked me the same question recently. The answer's really quite simple. If someone is going to pay a million pounds for a house, they like it to look like a million! What's the point in having a huge garden and a tiny cottage? No-one's going to be impressed with that!

Me: So you're saying that the reason there are small gardens is because of status!?

Him: Something like that. Look, people are busy working these days, it's not like the old days when people had the time to potter around in the vegetable patch. These houses are expensive; people have to work as much as they can just to keep paying off the mortgage. And when they come home, what do you think they want to do? Dig potatoes in the garden or sit in a nice lounge watching satellite tv and drinking a relaxing glass of red wine? If people really wanted small houses and large gardens then we would build that, although thinking about it we wouldn't earn as much money building a small house, so that wouldn't be very profitable would it?

Me: No, thanks for your time.

In most developed nations, there isn't much space left near cities, so the developers try to put as many bricks as possible per square metre. It makes good financial sense for them, but as we can see in cities like London, they have become huge sprawling metropolises, with mile after mile of slate roof. Sure some people have gardens but it is the buildings themselves that take up most of the space. "What are you moaning about?" asks the town planner, "We have lots of lovely gardens and parks where people can walk!" Let me tell you a short story.

One of the reasons I liked the idea of going to live in Australia was the space! I had heard a statistic somewhere, that the state of Western Australia – where only 2.2 million people lived – was the same size in land mass as India, and they had over a billion people there! Wow! I thought, this is going to be more like it, imagine the space we are all going to have.

So, imagine my surprise – when I started looking at houses to rent with my wife – that unless I had my own gold deposit, the most I would be able to afford would be a small house, tightly packed next to another one, with a postage size garden with sandy soil! I couldn't understand it, so I set out to find why we didn't all have massive spaces around us.

"Sure we have plenty of space around us, but most of it's uninhabitable unless you are a kangaroo!" a friend joked. He explained further. "Look, most Australians live in, or close to cities, because that's where the work is. You could live further out, but then you'd have a hell of a commute on your hands, most people are happy to put up with small gardens because (a) they're close to the city where they work and (b) the government have provided plenty of parks, and if you need more space, there's always the beach!"

How could this be? A new society created just 200 years ago falling into the same trap as a city like London (that had been going a lot longer and so could be excused somewhat) had? And suddenly I realised. The Australians were following the same model as every other consumer society with the businesses in the centre and the accommodation/retail parks/transport infrastructure surrounding it. "Of course, this is what everybody's idea of a modern city is like," I thought. People go to work. People come home to relax. The garden is only there to look pretty. They don't need a garden for anything else but laying a lawn and planting nice flowers and bushes around the outside so it looks pretty!

This isn't like the old days when people needed to grow their own carrots and potatoes and fruit, now they had money from working and could just pop down to the supermarket 24 hours a day in the car if they needed to. Why would they want to spoil their lovely lawn by having ugly vegetables sticking out of the ground! People want to have beauty surrounding them and so they create their own little piece of paradise. Their garden.

We ended up with a house on the end of a terrace 100 metres from the main shopping strip of the area, and were told how lucky indeed we were to have a garden at all in the city, when in fact many thousands of people had only a balcony, at the very most, in their apartment buildings. But I didn't really count myself "lucky," in fact I was disappointed with the whole thing; but even so, I decided to start by growing some tomato plants, and some herbs, in the sandy soil. The herbs all got eaten by slugs and bugs and the tomato plants fared no better. I think we got two tomatoes from the plant but boy did we savour them!

Our own piece of paradise, ten feet from someone else's

I now came to realise that most of Australia also lived like this. Maybe if they were a bit further out they had a bit more land, but as I travelled out of the city and looked on in horror at some of the new developments built on little more than dust, surrounded by two metre fencing, it came to me. This is what people want. They want a low maintenance garden that doesn't take much looking after, and as long as the inside of the house is big and well equipped, it's enough.

The developers were only building what the people wanted (and want them they did, if all the sold signs were to be believed). They wanted their square patch of land fenced in by neighbours with just enough space so the kids could run around in and a patio large enough to entertain guests during the famous "aussie barbecues." The plants and flowers were mere decoration.

So, the English developer I spoke to was right. People *are* too busy to worry about having large gardens with space enough to grow their vegetables, they had work to do during the day and gardens were for enjoying in the evening. They weren't from farming stock; these were city dwellers, brought up on fast food diets and consumer lifestyles.

What I was talking about was the past, a time when people couldn't afford to buy vegetables so they grew them themselves out of necessity, not out of some idealistic dream to be self-sufficient. And anyway, even if they wanted to be self-sufficient they sure would find it difficult to grow all they needed on a five metre square patch of land! It was me who was being idealistic, out of touch with the "real world," a world where everything I wanted and more was available to buy just as long as I had earned enough money.

That was the dream that people were chasing now. The ability to have everything you want at your fingertips. Heck, with internet shopping, all our groceries could be delivered to us without us ever having to step foot out of the door! I was living in the past, and I needed to wake up (I was told). Old men had vegetable plots. Old men had vegetable plots because they had nothing else to do.

The demise and rise of the veggie plot

Although I was resigned to the fact that modern cities needed modern gardens, my hopes were lifted last year when I was in the Czech Republic; where although the gardeners were, what you could call "retired," I saw many of these community plots dotted around the city. I found someone who spoke English and asked him why they were still doing it.

Me: Hi. Can I ask you why you're still growing your own vegetables in a city. It seems most people gave it up a long time ago.

Gardener: Have you seen the state of the vegetables you get in the supermarkets? They're disgusting, they are full of chemicals, and they have no taste.

Me: Oh, I agree with you. It's just that it looks like a lot of hard work.

Gardener: It is, but I find it relaxing coming down here after work.

Me: Oh, you still work, I thought you must be retired!

Gardener: No, I can't afford to retire, I still work in a factory for eight hours a day; this is my bit of peace at the end of the day, and it feels good to get your hands dirty, knowing that at the end of it, you will have beautiful tasting fruit and vegetables. Come. You look at the soil here, there are no fertilizers and no chemicals, you won't find soil like that on the big farms.

Me: I can see that (I had to agree, it not only felt good, but smelt good too.). But don't you have too

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

- much produce here for your own needs, won't it go off?
- Gardener:** No, we have a community garden here, there are over 30 of us each tending individual plots, but we all grow things we can exchange with each other. For example, my friend over there grows potatoes. I grow apples and pears. He has no apples and pears and I have no potatoes, do you understand?
- Me:** Yes, I think so.
- Gardener:** Other friends grow different fruits and vegetables, and we exchange. If we have too many we take them down to the local market and sell them and we split the profit. It is not much but we manage to pay for a few drinks with it, if you know what I mean?
- Me:** So do you have your own gardens at your homes?
- Gardener:** No, most of us still live in communist-era apartment blocks, but some have gardens. They don't grow anything there, just flowers and plants. But here when we get together we grow! It is very friendly here; sometimes we bring food up to share and maybe some beer in the evening during the summer.
- Me:** So would you like to do this for a living?
- Gardener:** No way, much too hard work, this is for fun, but we never have to buy any vegetables and they taste so good.
- Me:** It sounds like you've got it made.
- Gardener:** Maybe, my friend.
- Me:** Goodbye and good luck with the growing.

This got me thinking. If we can't beat the developers who build the houses so close together with the tiny gardens, and we can't convince people that having them just to put some flowers in is a waste; then maybe there was another way. Perhaps if we used an example like the gardener I had met, people could have fun mixing with other people, whilst at the same time supplying each other with all of their fruit and vegetable needs. And when they have too much they just whip it down to the local market and sell it. "Fresh, organic community vegetables, locally grown," then you can split the profits and maybe treat yourselves to a nice meal or a few drinks every so often. Who knows maybe you'll make more!

The rise of the community garden

So how do we start this community garden? Who would be in charge? Who would decide what vegetables to grow? How much is a five kilo bag of potatoes worth? One kilo of apples perhaps? What if people cheated, what if the people who worked there stole from each other? And other modern dilemmas created by the capitalist consumer society. But when we start thinking like this, the whole project is doomed from the start!

So, instead of worrying about who is going to cheat who, start chatting to your neighbours (you know, the people who live next door!) you may never have spoken to, or people at work or at social and sport clubs and see if they want to start a new club, but this time with no leader and no committee (otherwise you'll never get anything done), and see if anyone is interested in trying to start a community garden which grows fruit and vegetables etc. for the people involved with the project. So instead of having two sorry looking tomatoes to show for your growing effort, you will be rewarded by an endless supply of produce, as long as it is planned right!

There will, of course, have to be agreement on what to grow, and who will grow what, and how to manage pest control (no pesticides please), and then you are well on your way to the next stage; where to get the land from?

Now I am not suggesting that anybody should front up the money, or go to the bank and ask for a loan; we'd just be back at the beginning. No. We have to go to the council and ask them for some space for a new community garden. And we won't pay a penny for it!

The council always has some spare land somewhere that a greedy developer hasn't snatched up already, and as you are members of the tax paying community, you would like some community space (please). They are sure to listen to your charming persuasion!

Who knows, there may already be a community scheme like this operating in your local area and that will

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

save you all the hassle of starting a new one. What do you think? Do you like the idea of having your own vegetables and fruit for “free,” sharing in some community spirit, and taking away some small part of the supermarkets profit?

It sounds like a good deal to me, and when I eventually find a place to settle my weary head, I too will try to start one of these. Come on, it looks like it could be fun, sitting around on a summers evening with some friends sharing a cool drink and having a laugh after tending your crops. The city gentleman farmer is born.

It just seems as though we are wasting so much space – which we could be using to grow good quality food – that has now been engulfed by bricks and mortar. But instead of just complaining and blaming the developers, I have to look closer to home; to our own consumer tendencies, and the lifestyle we helped create for everyone. Maybe this project is one simple way to start appreciating where the food comes from and having a good time into the bargain!

Campaign for space to be given for your own community garden today!

Let's grow! (sorry for the pun)

[Back to Index](#)

Giving

1. *The act of giving*
2. *Transfer possession of something concrete or abstract to somebody*

Let us start by talking about the antonym of giving, which isn't receiving, it is taking. Whether we were always like this, or it is a new thing, we have become a society of takers, and we'll take anything we can get. So why are we like this? Is it in our biological make up? Is our dna encoded with selfishness? Well according to some scientists concerned with evolution, maybe it is!

Selfishness

1. Concerned chiefly or only with yourself and your advantage to the exclusion of others

As a species, human beings have been very successful; we have survived the worst the elements could throw at us, and we have come out the other side laughing. We have cities, cars, nice houses, plenty of food to eat (in some countries), and we have enough leisure time to enjoy doing things we like doing.

No more going out hunting and gathering every day for us. Those times have well passed, and we are now an advanced civilisation able to grow enough food around the world to feed everybody, and have the technology so that everyone can have clean water. This should be paradise for all of us, except it isn't, for so many. Millions of people are starving, dehydrated, sick from disease, on the run from war, homeless, helpless. Yet we carry on with our perfect lives, which you remember, are so easy now.

In the west, we aren't short of anything. We eat nice food, drink wine, go out to restaurants, go on holidays, go to the cinema and the theatre, gossip about our neighbours, mow the lawn, water the plants, and sit back and relax with a nice evening in front of the tv. Ahh, what could be better? Yet only a few hours away by plane there are people fighting for their lives.

Let me ask you a question: How many times have you flown long haul? The reason I am asking is that most of the big jets have a moving map on the back of the seat, which shows where you are, and which countries you are crossing over. I was fascinated by my reaction as we passed over countries where I knew fighting or killing was still going on, knowing that right at that moment, I was passing over people who were screaming in pain or starving, at the point of death. I was saddened that I flying above death, and destruction, enjoying myself; but then I switched over to the movie channel and all was well again. A meal was served or a cold drink from the bar and a bag of peanuts and those people's problems could be as far away as pluto as far as I was concerned.

Does that make me selfish? I didn't think so; this was an alien world to me. These people weren't my problem, what could I do? I had my own problems to think about. But it did make me start to think. Maybe selfishness is the reason we were so successful as a species. Maybe thinking only about number one and our close family group is the reason we are still here. Maybe it *is* every man for himself. Maybe before going to help someone else we have to help ourselves. So many maybes, so few answers.

What do you think? Are you selfish? Do you put yourself before others, and if so, is it a bad thing? Do you feel guilty about doing it or does it not even enter your mind?

Unfortunately, the whole issue of whether we are born to be selfish has been clouded by the fact that selfishness has been positively encouraged by modern western capitalist governments. We have been encouraged to think only about what we can get for ourselves, and this principle has helped drive our economies to be highly successful. We are only interested in making money for *me*.

I want to get rich. I want to be successful. I want to have the most successful company in the world. I want a big house. I want a big car. I want I want I want, and I will get. And if you have enough skill and determination you may just get there. But then what?

You have enough money and security, for you, your partner, and your children. None of you want for anything. Everyone can have anything. You will never have to worry about money again. Does this make you less selfish now you have everything you have ever wanted? Will you suddenly start to give? Perhaps.

Maybe you will donate large sums of money to charity. Maybe you will dedicate some of your time to working for a charity, maybe helping to raise money for them. You may set up a foundation. But let me ask you one thing. Would you have done these things if you weren't successful, if you weren't rich?

What if you were the average man in the street, with a poorly paid job, a small house, little money, two children, and debts. Would you still help others? Based on the evidence we have seen, you wouldn't think so.

“I’m too busy; I’ve got enough problems without helping other people.”

Yet strangely, people do!

I am not one of those people. In my life, I never thought about helping others. I worked hard (sometimes), enjoyed myself, bought myself nice things, ran up bills on my credit cards, went to the pub, and mostly thought about no one else – not even my parents really. I couldn’t even be bothered sending them birthday cards or giving presents (unless I had plenty of extra money left over to spend on myself). So if you want to talk selfish, you don’t need to look any further than me! I only worried about how much money I had for myself.

Did my parents encourage that attitude? Was I born like it; or was I merely conditioned into behaving a certain way by society? I do not know the answer, but I know that all the time I was growing up and beyond, my parents themselves did charitable work, and in fact have been charitable to me my whole life! Any time I got into trouble with money, there they were, ready to bail me out – always ready to give a helping hand; selflessly, because I was their son. Maybe by helping me all the time, they unwittingly kept me selfish, but I will never know and neither will they. All I know is that I never helped one person in life. I only helped myself.

Writing this now seems strange, as I feel I am writing about someone else, someone I do not know. But this person is me, but just at a different time. Does this seem terrible to you reading how selfish I have been, when all I have been thinking about is me. My happiness. My sadness. My problems. Me, me, me?

What I want to explore with you is whether there is anything wrong with that attitude? Why does it have to be bad to be thinking about oneself all the time? Who does it hurt? If you were to have posed that question to me several years ago, I would have said nobody, and taken great affront at the fact you had asked me that question. You see, the problem is, a selfish person doesn’t even know they are being selfish because they are too wrapped up in themselves!

Once again, we come back to our old friend, awareness. But if I am being selfish, and I am aware I am being selfish, will I still be selfish? That will be your choice, but the more you become aware of yourself in action, the more likely you are to shift your thinking.

As we recall, awareness is that fraction of a micro-second in between thought and action, where you stop, just for a moment before you actually do what you are thinking about doing. It is in that moment when selfishness leaves and unselfishness can enter.

Let the giving begin!

For those of you concerned that I am suggesting you hand over all your worldly possessions to a charity, let me assure you that that is not what giving is about! It is not about being altruistic and public spirited. It is a shift in thinking.

Giving is not concerned with not earning money, for that is necessary in this society to live, nor is it about letting others use you as a doormat and taking advantage of your giving nature. It is about going beyond selfishness.

Do for the benefit of all others

So how do you do something for the benefit of all others? Does this mean you cannot work to earn money for yourself, or cannot go on holiday, or buy a television, or a nice car? Of course not. I am realistic that we live in a modern world and we like to have modern things; we also have to earn money to buy food, pay our bills and taxes which help the wider community. This is about thinking not about yourself, or your family or kinship groups, but about everybody in the whole world – even the ones who haven’t been born yet.

Think about it for a moment. Think about what an important gift that is. The work and the life you lead is for the benefit of all others!

I can hear most of you grumbling about how this doesn’t make sense, and how you can’t see it working, and it’s not possible, and that actually, it’s one of the stupidest ideas you’ve ever heard! But it’s not an idea, it’s a way of living that simply states: “Every action I do, I do for the benefit of the planet, the children in

africa, the murderer in prison, the future generations, the oceans, the girl who was raped last night, the rivers, the people suffering from illness mental and physical, the drunk man in the street, the greedy man, the violent husband...”

If this is all a bit too philosophical and whimsical for you, let’s start talking in plain language, shall we?

One big reason for a lot of problems here on this planet (which you remember you share with billions of others, plants, animals, insects, fish and humans), is *you!* In your selfishness, you have forgotten that we are all linked by a common bond; nature. Something we seem determined to stamp out, if it’s the last thing we do. We seem to have forgotten that every action we take affects someone, somewhere else. That’s not philosophy, that’s a fact.

If we all decide to eat beef, forests must be cleared for grazing; cattle must be watered, grain must be grown in a field, which must be watered and harvested, and processed to feed the cattle. Someone must then butcher the cattle, process the cattle, pack them in plastic which must be moulded after the oil is drilled from the ground; then shipped in cartons, that use cardboard that comes from trees which must be cut down; then loaded onto a truck which must be made from metal which must be mined then manufactured in a factory that must be built and run on electricity which must be mined, then burned then distributed, to generate electricity; and then the truck will carry the meat, using fuel, which is petroleum, which comes from oil, which is dug out of the ground, to the shop where it stored which uses electricity. Finally you buy it, take it home, cook it using electricity and eat in five minutes flat.

So, hopefully, you can see from this simplistic model, how our actions affect others. All others, not just some others. Remember that.

The whole world is about links. This book is about subjects that are linked. You are linked to so many events and people in the world you don’t even know about! That is why we must do everything for the benefit of all others, because if we remain selfish and do everything for the benefit of ourselves, we are still affecting others on the planet, only more likely than not, it will be adversely. I think the main problem is in the western world, most people are not aware they are adversely affecting others. Let me give you a quick example.

If an upstanding member of the community who does charity for work for the homeless and orphaned children in the united states decides he will buy an orphaned child a soft fluffy toy, most of you would think it is a nice gesture, and the child who has seen so much sadness in its life, will be happy to receive such a gift. But the toy was made in china by a child labourer, the same age as the recipient. He is forced to work 12 hours a day for next to nothing. The money that is raised by the sale of the toy, goes back to fund the military and a government that is a brutally oppressive regime.

This is not about making ethical choices. It is about awareness of how everything you do is linked to something else. So before you take action, reflect for a moment on the effect it is having on all others, and ask yourself if the action is to the detriment of anyone or anything else on the planet. That is the principle of giving as I see it.

Most of you will say “This is too hard, how are we to research all the links in the world to see if buying a fluffy toy has a detriment on any others? That’s a crazy and unworkable idea!”

It may seem hard to do, but the most important things in life are never easy. A lot of you might argue and say “What about giving time, isn’t that important?” or “If no one gave money to charity lots more people would suffer or die in the world,” or “how dare you criticise the work that charities do, they are helping people and the planet the world over, without them the world would be a worse place to live in...”

The way I see it, charity is the end result of selfishness. Giving is the beginning of compassion.

[Back to Index](#)

Globalisation

1. Growth to a global or worldwide scale

Big is better!

We've heard a lot about globalisation in the news recently, haven't we? It's usually a raggy band of protesters at some economic summit "protesting" about corporations, shouting "Down with capitalism," and eventually fighting with the police or smashing things up! Great. But I don't think that gets you and I any closer to understanding what globalisation is, and whether it is good for us as a species and the planet in general, does it? It merely alienates these protesters more, and has them condemned as anarchists, without getting the root of the problem.

So what is globalisation? It's exactly as it says in the dictionary – growth to a global or worldwide scale. So what does this mean to you? Well, If you live in the developed world it probably means wide product choice, availability, and cheap prices. Can you think of anything else?

The one thing that has been global for many centuries, is religion, something you don't hear many people complaining about! So before you read any further, understand this. Globalisation is not destroying the planet. Globalisation in itself is not a bad thing. If we look at globalisation in a different way, we could say that the earth is our local community and all globalisation is, is a method to connect us all, to bring communities with different skin colours, different languages and different traditions together. What do you think?

The problem is that when we hear about globalisation in the media, and from scruffy protesters, what they are talking about is the high flying world of cola and auto marketing, sprinkled with some shady global finance and oil companies. What we have to remember is that these people are just trying to make a living selling us stuff in the spirit of free enterprise, something that has been encouraged since entrepreneurial men began trading with other countries.

The west has long since traded with asia, especially in textiles and spices – the volume of trade has just got bigger! So we shouldn't be surprised when people want to sell their products to everybody else in the world. They think it's a good product and they think people will buy it, and sometimes they're right, they do. Whether it is ethically right or not, that is not for us to determine.

Remember, we are dealing with individuals with big brains here, you know! These are people who can think for themselves and make their own choices, they are part of the most intelligent species on the planet, who are we to impose our will on them?

If a woman in some back water in china sees an advert for a cola drink, she has the choice to say no! People who are anti-globalisation, think it's wrong that these big companies exist, and are using up all the planets resources, but there is no such thing as right and wrong, only choice, and if someone chooses to buy a cola drink and pays money for it, who are you and I to say it is wrong?

Personally, I wouldn't drink the stuff, because I don't think it is good for the system, it creates a lot of rubbish, and uses up water supplies that could be used for better things, like erm, drinking water! Do you follow what I am trying to say here? I have made the choice not to drink the cola drink, due to self-education and awareness.

I have the opinion that what the product contains, is not going to have a positive effect on my body, coupled to the fact that I know plastics are bad for the environment, the volume of water used up for a product with no nutritional benefits is high, and that the massive production and distribution networks built up around this product of no nutritional value, place a heavy burden on non-renewable resources. That is my choice.

What the protesters fail to realise, is that if everyone had the awareness and education regarding cola, the cola company would – if you pardon the pun – go quickly into liquidation. It would be gone; finito! There would be no more cola. Never forget that. We, the people of the world, keep the large multinationals in business, without us, they crumble – instantly.

So, instead of blaming the cola firm, blame the woman in the rural chinese village, who had no awareness, nor education of the impact of the product on herself, or the environment; and allowed her mind to tempt her into trying one! I am serious. All of us are responsible for the growth of global companies because we buy what they sell. That's just business.

So, if you want to smash the windows at a fast food restaurant in your town, go ahead, but it won't stop people eating there. The same goes for smashing the windows at an oil company, it wont stop people driving their cars. Only they can decide to stop doing that. Informed, individual choice is the key to halting the massive drain on our natural resources by certain global firms. That's all it will take to halt the expansionist

policies they have.

Although you try telling someone in a village they don't want a car because it's "bad," when actually, they do! They're sick of toiling all day long on foot, and now they want something to make their life easier. The other problem one has, is that people in developing countries (apprentice consumers) see what we have, and want it! Just like the western traders saw the beautiful silks in asia, and wanted them. It is no different.

Sometimes I feel sorry for these large companies, who are caught up in these globalisation struggles. You see, they started out small, and like most small businesses, when they see an opportunity to expand, take it. They didn't set out to ruin the world, they probably set out to make it better; after all, which bank is going to support a brand new business whose mission it is to use up all the worlds resources, and addict people to their product?

Lots of people refuse to wear certain brands because they use sweatshop (*factory where workers do piecework for poor pay and are prevented from forming unions; common in the clothing industry*) labour, but most textiles are made by people working in harsh conditions. It has never been a pleasant industry to work in, even in this country. But the interesting thing is, I never hear people complaining about not accepting coal for their fire or refusing to accept electricity that was generated by coal. That truly is a "sweatshop" job, working in the dark, half a mile below the surface of the earth in cramped, and dangerous conditions.

We have to look at this objectively, if we are to understand the truth of it. There is no good just picking on companies because they operate in multiple countries. They may pay poor wages, and may have poor conditions for the workers, and what they make may damage the environment irreparably, but then we'd have to look at 50 other local companies doing the same thing, and maybe even worse. Our challenge here is to investigate globalisation, not to condone it or criticise it.

So let's look at one global phenomenon shall we? The first is the mobile phone, used by hundreds of millions of people worldwide, owned by a handful of companies. The second is the internet, used by tens of millions of people connected by a backbone owned by a handful of companies. Oh, and before I forget, I am writing this book on a laptop made by a multi-national company. So let's forget all this talk about companies, we will deal with that topic separately, let's just finish by saying that individuals have the last say in whether companies stay, not only global, but in business at all, and that we *all* have a responsibility to investigate each product we buy to ensure it is not adversely affecting the well-being of the planet, animals, or humans.

We also have to recognise that some advances have only been made possible thanks in part to globalisation – for example, medicines, which have saved the lives of millions of people worldwide. Before we criticise something we must investigate it fully.

Going global

I would like to talk to you about a different kind of globalisation now, one that has nothing to do with industry.

One benefit I noticed, when I worked for a large company in information technology, many years ago, was I got to travel to other offices. For me, it was great to get to meet so many people from so many different countries, all with different traditions and cultures. All too often we get stuck working in our local community, with the same people doing the same thing, and we become insular in our views. We see everyone from abroad as an unwelcome outsider. In short, our world view can be very limited. For some people, the most they see of people from other countries, is when they take their two week package holidays (the british especially).

Some people rarely travel outside of their own countries on holiday, preferring the company of their own country folk. But it is good for the species as a whole to mix with, and try to understand other people from faraway countries, whose languages we don't speak.

How often do we ever get involved with helping other people in other countries less fortunate than ourselves? Ok, maybe we give a donation or two, but one of the problems of not seeing the world as a whole is division. The separation of people into countries, languages, religions. We need to globalise more, not less, and I am not talking about for profit either.

We need to break down the barriers that exist between us, and learn to understand each other. I don't mean understanding culture, that is a mere external expression of the person, I mean really getting to know

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

another human being from a different part of the world, sharing experiences, and healing the divisions that have isolated so many of us from each other, thanks to skin colour, language, nationalism and religion amongst others.

So what do you think? Are you able to go global? It's all very well to stay put, where it's safe and warm, and you know everyone, and you have a nice job, and a nice quiet life; but if we are to move forward as a planet, we've got to start getting to know each other a bit better – this separateness has kept us fighting for too long. We have got so used to only hearing our own language, and being around our own culture, that we have forgotten that this planet is ours, all of ours.

We are not defined by skin colour, language and culture; underneath we are all the same, human. The rulers of the countries may have laid down borders to keep us separate to define their lands (not ours), but the world is ours, not for the taking, but for the exploring. The time has come when identity cards and passports that define us as having one nationality go. For too long, the powerful have wanted to control us. We are the powerful, and we should let it be known that we will travel the globe, and we will not be restricted to having nationality, which is a man-made concept.

Unfortunately, most people only want to travel to another country for a better lifestyle than they had in their previous country. All they want is what they had in their own country, plus a bigger house, a bigger car, and better education for their children. That is economic migration, not globalisation.

Globalisation is the right to roam free in our world without men in suits restricting us. Not so we can go to countries to earn more money, but to connect up with our fellow man across the globe! Idealistic? Mad? Crazy? Maybe! But I just want you to understand how I see the concept of globalisation, and it doesn't come packaged in a cola can or a burger box. The more we are kept separate from each other, the more the fear of each other will increase.

Come on everyone, we've got nothing to fear from each other. We're not aliens! We're human. We're all exactly the same. It's time to get out there and start meeting each other. We are so insular, how do we ever expect to get on with someone from another planet when we don't even know our neighbours?

Branch out. Expand. Globalise.
Not your company. You!

[Back to Index](#)

God

1. *Any supernatural being worshipped as controlling some part of the world or some aspect of life
or who is the personification of a force*
2. *A man of such superior qualities that he seems like a deity to other people*
3. *A material effigy that is worshipped*
4. *The supernatural being conceived as the perfect and omnipotent and omniscient originator and
ruler of the universe; the object of worship in monotheistic religions*

Who do you think you are writing about god?
What do you know about god?
How dare you!
Blasphemer!

I indeed, I have asked myself the same question, many a time. Who am I to write about god? What do I know about him? I have pondered over writing this topic for a long time now, but I feel I am now ready to open a dialogue with you. It may not be an easy dialogue, as we are dealing with conditioned minds: Minds that have been conditioned by parents, history, religious gurus and teachers.

It will not be an easy path, but if we both open our minds, we may find out something incredible. What do you say? Are you ready to explore this most difficult of topics with me? Or do you want to skip reading this in case anything that is said here conflicts with the ideas that your mind has been imprinted with? Good, now we can begin.

For many thousands of years there has been talk of god; an all powerful being, who created Man in his own image. Prophets (*someone who speaks by divine inspiration; someone who is an interpreter of the will of god*) have spoken to us, books have been written by disciples, in fact for the last several thousand years, god has been the one word on everybody's lips.

God is like all supernatural beings, invisible to the naked eye, but that's not to say he doesn't exist, after all, the wind is invisible to the naked eye, yet we can still feel its presence. Some have written that god is in fact in you, or that we are all god. One man recently published a book called "Conversations with god," where he had an apparent dialogue with the man himself. We are obsessed with the divine.

The idea that god could have created this world in seven days goes against all that the scientists have discovered about Man evolving from the apes. So who is right? Did god create the world, or did the world randomly evolve over a great length of time. I think to truly understand all this we will have to throw away such questions which after all have only lead to a lot of argument in the past (and the present), and start to ask different questions of ourselves.

If no one had told you about god existing would you still believe in him? If you had not been given religious instruction in your various religions would you be so wholeheartedly defending god? But maybe you "found" god after a difficult period in your life and god helped you through it?

**

Scientists are in a difficult position are they not? They try to find out the truth of things by doing experiments and measuring the results, but science has not found a way to prove or disprove that god exists. And even if they did come up with evidence, what do you think you would say, if you believed in god? "What utter nonsense! These scientists should be sacked at the very least for suggesting such a thing."

Science is interested in facts. But the only "facts" they have to hand about god's existence, are the words which were written down many thousands of years ago. Occasionally, there will be "miracles," or some effigy will weep in a remote mountain village, but there are no "hard" facts.

"We don't need hard facts," say the believers, "*we know* god exists."

The scientists would say that yes, you can believe there is a god, but there is growing physical evidence that Man has evolved from the apes in africa several million years ago, and through the process of natural selection, and several million years, out pops homo sapiens, ready to tell anyone who will listen, that he in fact did not evolve from the apes; he was always a man, just as he is now, thanks to god creating the world in seven days...

We seem to be constantly at war with each others minds, fighting each other psychologically and physically, to prove god is better than your god.

Poor old god, if he did exist, would be sitting high in the heavens shaking his head, saying "no, no, no, this won't do, they haven't understood a thing. Why did I even bother!" And we have to ask ourselves that question as well. If god really exists, why did he create the world – what was he trying to achieve? Please forgive me if you think I am taking this a bit too far, but I feel we must "ask" god himself these questions, and have our own "conversation with god." Let us begin.

Me: So god, I just wanted to know one thing, if you do exist, then why did you create this world?

God: Because I could.

Me: Is there any purpose behind it?

God: No it just is.

Me: Is god your real name, or do you have another name I should call you?

God: You can call me god or whatever else you want, it doesn't really matter.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Me: Are you angry with Man for the trouble he has caused here, for all the misery and suffering he has caused himself and others?

God: Man has caused the pain for himself and others because he does not understand.

Me: Understand what?

God: What life is.

Me: And what is life exactly?

God: You will find out, but you must open your mind.

Me: So how will I find out?

God: You already know the answer.

Me: But I don't, please tell me.

God: All will be revealed.

Me: But when?

God: When you find out.

Me: But I have so little time on earth, I need to know now.

God: Why do you care about time, it is unimportant.

Me: Because one day I shall die, and I want to know before then.

God: All of you want to know the answer, but that answer lies within yourselves.

Me: But god...

God: Sorry, I've got to go.

So. I just had a conversation with god, right? Did I? Was I talking to the great man himself, or was it all in my mind? I am serious. I asked some serious questions, I wanted to know the answer to, and "god" replied. Was I communing with a higher power, or were those answers just coming out of my own mind? How can I know? How can I "prove" it? Can you prove I wasn't in a dialogue with the entity that created the whole world? Can I prove I was?

Actually it doesn't matter. I wrote god's answers without thought or preparation, they just flowed "through" me, and they ended up on this page. Have I just proved god's existence, or have I deluded myself into thinking that there is more than there already is? I will never know.

But the answers "god" gave me, enlightened me a little. The answers were not what I was expecting, although they are in line with my own thinking. Do you see? Perhaps the answers are all in me, and all I have to do is ask the right question until I reach the truth of it all. Go on, have a go yourselves; ask "god" a question and write down the first answer that comes into your mind. This does not require analysis, just an open mind. When you have finished, come back and we will restart our discussion.

You see, I do not want to prove or disprove the existence of god to you, or to anybody; it serves you and I no purpose. I do not want to convert you to my way of thinking, whatever it may be, I just want to explore this deeply with you, so we both may be awoken.

God or god?

Actually, it doesn't matter if we give him a capital letter or a small letter, the only difference is how you think about it. If you think god is more important than any of us, then you should give him (it's funny that god is always a man don't you think?) a Capital letter, but if you are ready to explore something that is more than mere words can explain, then it makes no difference if it is a capital G or small g; after all, the alphabet was made by men, not god.

I am now hooked into asking god questions, so forgive me while I ask a few more.

Me: God, if you are a supreme being, do you look like a human?

God: Why should I look like you? Do you look like a lion or a mouse?

Me: Then why do people say you made Man in your own image?

God: Men say lots of things.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Me: Are you solid or are you a part of the universe?
God: I am the universe.
Me: Ah, so your saying that you are everything, that you are everything that exists and has ever existed?
God: That's right.
Me: I see. So if you are everything, I am everything.
God: Right again.
Me: Does that mean I am god also?
God: Why would it? You decided to call me god. I didn't tell you my name.
Me: So what is your name?
God: It is unimportant.
Me: Ok, I understand. Last question. Should I be afraid of you?
God: Are you afraid of yourself?
Me: But I thought you said I am not god.
God: I keep telling you. You came up with the name, it means nothing.
Me: Ok, sorry. One final question, Why is everyone afraid of you?
God: Because they cannot see me. And what they cannot see they do not understand.
Me: Then why do you punish people.
God: I do not punish people, people punish people. I just am.
Me: Am I?
God: Of course you are. I have to go.

I'm pretty impressed. Not only has god spoken to me, he has confirmed what I already thought. This is strange. I wonder if I ask the questions and try to answer them myself, if I will still get the same answers? Let us ask our questions.

Me: Why am I miserable all the time, why is life not perfect.
Answer: Life is perfect, you just think it isn't.
Me: Then why do so many people suffer.
Answer: (silence)

At this point I found it hard to answer. I couldn't get the thought from my mind to the paper. Let's ask god. It's easier!

Me: Then why do people suffer?
God: Because they are lost, they do not know the path.
Me: What is the path?
God: Do you not know?
Me: No. How can I find out?
God: You already did.
Me: Did I?
God: Yes, the path is the one you have chosen.
Me: But is it the right path to end suffering?
God: Why do you keep going on about suffering? I have already told you that Man causes his own suffering; there is no purpose to it. The universe is the path.
Me: Is it? How do I know? How can I tell it is the path, I need some guidance here!
God: From who?
Me: From you.
God: Who am I?
Me: Me?
God: Wrong. I am me.
Me: But you said...

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

God: We are separate, but undivided. Does that make sense?

Me: Not at all. Why can't you give me a straight answer?

God: Why don't you ask a straight question?

Me: I thought I did. Ok, I see that suffering is man-made, not by divine intervention, that I call you god, but that it not your name. I am the universe and so are you, but I am not god. I am separate but undivided, which means that there is individual consciousness as part of the whole which is everything.

God: Goodbye.

That was seriously amazing. You probably won't believe me that I couldn't ask myself the question and answer it straight away, but when I asked god (whom I shall now call everything) what the answer was, I could keep going until I think I answered it *from* myself. I am now convinced, not that god is an entity, capable of great power and destruction if we displease him, but that what we call god is consciousness in the universe. The consciousness is everywhere and is everything. We cannot answer the question ourselves, because we do not know the answer, because we are limited by thought, but by putting the question out into the universal consciousness, I come back with an answer. I'm impressed!

But hold on, couldn't this just be insight?

[Back to Index](#)

Gossip

1. *Light informal conversation for social occasions*
2. *A report (often malicious) about the behaviour of other people*
3. *A person given to gossiping and divulging personal information about others*
4. *Wag one's tongue; speak about others and reveal secrets or intimacies*

“Shhh, Don’t tell anyone, but did you know john from accounts is sleeping with sally from marketing?”

“No! Really?”

“Yes it’s true, betty from telesales, was told by simon from the factory, because he was in a pub the other night and saw them together”

“No!”

“Yes, It’s true! Did you know he’s married?”

“Really?”

“Yes, and he’s got children, I mean, you never know what’s going on, do you? Just think how his poor wife must feel?”

“Yes, she’d be heartbroken.”

It doesn't matter that actually John and Sally arranged to meet after work because they both play badminton! As far as the office gossips are concerned, if someone says it's true, it must be.

Wherever you go in life, there is someone gossiping about someone else. From the offices of the large corporations I used to work in, to the small spiritual community where I am volunteering at the moment – gossip is rife.

Not content with talking about our friends, family and colleagues, we now have magazines and television programmes dedicated solely to gossiping about celebrities' lives. People we have never met, nor will probably ever meet. This is how far we have come in our lives, the end result of millions of years of evolution.

Four billion years after the earth was created, and here we are, sitting in front of the tv, eating junk food, and looking at pictures of people who have become well known for one reason or another (rich, model, TV star, actor), and who has been photographed or filmed, (a) coming out of a nightclub drunk, (b) with someone other than their partner, (c) with a prostitute (d) snorting cocaine or some other drug or (e) involved in some other scandal (*disgraceful gossip about the private lives of other people*).

One question I want to ask you all, is whether gossip can ever be helpful? Can gossip ever be construed as well meaning, or positive? Before you answer, I would like you to think about it for a moment. Does talking about people's lives make your life any better and does it make their lives better? Of course not!

But don't we feel really sneaky talking about people behind their backs? They can't hear us whispering our poisonous words about them, and when we see them or talk to them, we never mention we were gossiping about them, do we? Then it wouldn't be gossip. Instead we are all smiles. We pretend they are our best friend and yet we stab them in the back with malicious rumours or discussion of their private lives.

How many of us have been told something in confidence by someone and promised never to divulge it, yet as soon as we get the opportunity say "I shouldn't tell you this, I promised not to tell anyone, but did you know that..." I can't believe I have been guilty of that on so many occasions. I listen to someone's innermost secrets, and then casually share them with friends down the pub.

In response to the question, of whether gossip can ever be positive, I would have to say that gossip is always malicious. It always relates to someone else's bad points (in our opinion), or things they have done they don't want other people to know about.

I often wonder how these celebrities feel when they see themselves in the paper or the trashy magazines, doing something they aren't proud of or want to keep secret. They must be distraught. Even though they court public attention, to see a picture of yourself stumbling out of a nightclub at 6.00 am must be quite unpleasant. Remember, for all their faults, celebrities are human too, even if we don't treat them as such. For us, they are people who have made a lot of money by being in the public eye so we have an inherent right to spy on them!

At heart, we are just voyeurs. Not in a sexual way (although that occurs too), but in a "your life is more interesting than mine way." Why do you think we have become so addicted to reality tv programmes where we "spy" on people's lives for extended periods of time?

We love them, we can't get enough of them, so the tv companies make more and more. They have finally found what the public likes best – voyeuristic programmes with real people, not actors, so that every day at work, or at home, or in the pub, we can say:

"Did you see what happened last night! I can't believe she did that!"

"Yes I know, you'd think she'd have more sense."

Day in, day out, we watch people, listen to them and discuss them; good points and bad points.

Let me ask you something. Don't you think gossip is a real waste of energy, do you not think we could spend our time discussing more important issues in the world? "Why?" says you. "That's no fun, gossip is much more fun." But fun is not what gossip is at all, fun is sharing and laughing together, not secreting yourself in a corner with a confidant, and sharing half truths and rumours (which are always negative or used in a negative way).

For those of you who say that gossip can be used positively, please try to think of any time when you have gossiped about someone in a positive way.

"You know John?"

"Yes..."

“Did you know he’s going to be promoted to office manager?”

“John? You can’t be serious, he’s useless”

“I know, I don’t know what they were thinking...”

“Oh, hi john, just heard about your promotion, congratulations, you deserve it!”

I cannot understand it why are we so two-faced (*marked by deliberate deceptiveness especially by pretending one set of feelings and acting under the influence of another*) Why can’t we say what we are thinking? Because as humans we want people to think we like them – to avoid conflict. But underneath the jokes and the smiles is the jealous and malicious person, full of hate, rage and envy. That is the person who gossips.

We just can’t stop talking about each other

It starts off all innocently doesn’t it? A few back-handed words about a friend or a colleague who has done something to offend you, or maybe someone you don’t particularly like, (if you liked them, why would you talk about them behind their back?) but slowly it grows inside, like a disease, and you find that your whole conversation becomes about other people; what you heard and what you saw. It doesn’t even have to be out loud.

We talk to ourselves all the time about others. “Look at her, who does she think she is? She’s nobody special.” “I can’t believe he got promoted, above me, he’s useless, I’m so much better than him.” The incessant chattering in the brain, always judging ourselves, and always judging others. So where does it all end, this malicious gossip?

If you aren’t aware of it, military regimes, and dictatorships around the world use gossip to keep tabs on dissenters and people plotting against them. Throughout countries with totalitarian (*characterized by a government in which the political authority exercises absolute and centralized control*) governments, people were encouraged to spy on their neighbours, to tell the secret police about their activities. Of course they found no shortage of volunteers did they?

Thanks to the information provided, thousands of people were imprisoned and/or executed as a result of the information passed to the authorities. It still goes on now. Right now there are people all over the world knocking on the doors of the authorities to give information about other peoples activities. In the light of recent events in the world some of you may believe that to be a good thing.

Western governments are putting up posters everywhere, taking out adverts, in papers and on tv. “If you see anything suspicious, contact us now.” The governments are so concerned with terrorism that they now want us to spy on our neighbours as well. Do you not think this is reminiscent of the old cold war era? “No” says you, “that era was about control and oppression, our government is fighting for freedom. We need to stop the terrorists so if we have to spy on our neighbours to stop them blowing us up, so be it. I’m glad to give any assistance to the government.” But please, you must remember this, it is still gossip. It is still talking about someone else.

“Yes, but I saw him building a bomb.”

This is easy. If you have facts that will help less people being killed, then you should try to do something about it. Most police operations have information given by grasses (*someone acting as an informer or decoy for the police*), and a grass is just a different name for a gossip. The police and the security services rely on peoples inherent nature to gossip and talk about others in order to get information to stop dangerous events (such as explosions) from actually taking place or to bring about the end of paedophile rings etc.

Information is different from gossip only in one way. It is provided with the express intention of helping others on the planet, otherwise it is just gossip and is malicious.

So do you think we will ever be able to transcend this poisonous trait so inherent in human life? It has been around for a long time and shows no signs of abating. Always negative, never positive. Were we born like it? Doubtful. It is almost certainly a learned behaviour from society, from listening to our parents, our teachers and our peers, and starts early on in life, probably in the playground.

So how do we go beyond this, will we evolve enough so we no longer gossip? Who knows, but all I know is that it is a poisonous arrow in the side of the human race, and causes nothing but suffering. It is malicious and vindictive and bears no relation to our compassionate nature. This is a bolt-on attribute and not a very

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

nice one at that.

The only way forward is to make a big shift, right now; where we make a promise to each other to stop gossiping about other people, and try to develop love for each other. So what if people do things you don't like. Who cares if John is sleeping with someone and he's married. So what if someone has nineteen illegitimate children. None of this matters. It is unimportant, has no effect on our lives, and helps no one by gossiping about it. So why do it?

Go beyond it now. Vow with me to stop gossiping and help the world be a more understanding and peaceful place. Do it now. I have. You will probably find like most people, that this big shift doesn't work quite as quickly as you would like. That's where awareness comes in.

With awareness, you are not forcing yourself to stop doing something, you are just noticing, quietly, the internal voice, noticing quietly what you say, and noticing quietly what you do. You are not trying to stop anything, merely paying attention to yourself. It is through this noticing, and your commitment to yourself, that you will go beyond gossip. Be aware in the moment. Right now.

[Back to Index](#)

Government

1. *The organization that is the governing authority of a political unit*
2. *(government) the system or form by which a community or other political unit is governed*
3. *The act of governing; exercising authority*

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Name: Alan Macmillan Orr
Sex: Male
DOB: 06/04/1969
Passport No: 203781469
Caution: “This passport remains the property of *Her Majesty’s Government* and may be withdrawn at any time”

I don't know how long governments have been around, but there have always been people in power for as long as Man has tried to organise himself into social hierarchies. Modern governments now look after social welfare, health, education, employment, public services like roads, oh and war if necessary, and they do it all for YOU. Well they say they do, because you pay for it (you know, through those little things called taxes, which are compulsory I might add).

But why do governments really exist? Can Man not look after himself? Is he not the most intelligent species on the planet, capable of great discoveries? Let's face it, Man used to get on all right before there were governments. He made shelter, found food and water, made clothes, and managed to keep the species going quite nicely, thank you very much! But something changed, and that change came, when the groups began to get larger, and Man was able to specialise, thanks to the development of early agriculture which freed his mind to really start making mischief.

Of course the people need us!
What would they do without us?
They would be lost!
We provide security, peace...
blah blah blah

But anyway, we're stuck with governments now, aren't we? We might be lucky enough to live in a democracy where the people "vote" for the party who they want to be in "power" (usually the people who promise the individual the most, like lower taxes, etc.), but do we really know what we are voting for?

The parties all have manifestos (*a public declaration of intentions, as issued by a political party or government*), but most of us have never seen one, let alone read one, probably because they are not delivered to our door. So we vote for the party who stands for the things we think are important to us, like "law and order," "immigration," "lower taxes," "bigger pensions," or we just vote for the party our parents voted for. "My father always voted conservative," or "I am a third generation republican" and all that nonsense.

The politicians campaign to get our votes, and on polling day we mark a cross on the ballot sheet, and our vote is sealed away in a box. On election night the media follow the counting, and we are told about swings to the left and swings to the right, and finally a winner is announced!

"Hooray! Our party has got in," we shout, and the politicians have a wild party to celebrate. But tomorrow, it's back to the same old business of counting the taxes, diverting the taxes and wasting the taxes.

Whoever got in, the roads will still be there, the hospitals will still save us, and electricity will still flow to our homes. Our cars will still start, and our favourite shopping malls will still have their doors open ready to welcome us.

If you are unlucky enough to be living in a country run by a dictator, or by a corrupt government diverting your money to their own personal swiss bank accounts, then my sympathies go out to you. The election was probably rigged, or you may not even have had an election, but life carries on.

You will still have to pay taxes for the government to control you and imprison you for speaking out, which is one thing we don't have in a democracy! "No, sir, we have freedom of speech! We allow you to say what you want, isn't that nice of us?" And nice it is. How thoughtful of the powerful to allow us, the meek and mild, to say what we want, to use our own vocal chords. They really are most gracious. We bow down to you, oh great ones, for being so generous.

But enough of the sarcasm, we are on a serious investigation here to find out what it is we can't live without if we had no government.

Let's go nuclear!

I don't know what all those environmentalist hippies are going on about. Nuclear power is amazing. Thanks to some great physics by some of the world's top scientists, we can generate power by some process called a nuclear reaction. Clean energy for all. No more digging for coal, or trying to tap gas or oil resources. We just dig up some uranium, do some clever stuff with it and out comes the energy. Fantastic!

Sorry, someone is talking to me:

“What’s that?... Toxic?...What’s toxic?... No, they said it’s clean... Oh!... Really?... Oh dear...

Sorry about that, someone just pointed something out, that actually, although the nuclear energy is “clean” in that it doesn’t spew out pollution into the atmosphere, they have a teeny weeny problem, and that’s how to get rid of the waste.

I have been informed that the preferred method of getting rid of this radioactive (*the spontaneous emission of a stream of particles or electromagnetic rays in nuclear decay*) material, is “deep and secure burial,” whereby I guess they mean that they bury it in our earth, cover it up, and wait a few thousand years until the ground is safe again. I have even heard people talk about sending it into space or burying it in the ocean floor.

In fact, I imagine governments would do anything to get rid of it. You see, radioactive material is just a little bit dangerous to the human (oh and the planet). In fact, in many countries there are millions of gallons of radioactive waste and thousands of tons of spent nuclear fuel. But it’s ok, the environmental protection agencies are on to the case! I’m sure they will be thinking of how to pollute some other planet in the solar system with our waste.

“Yeah! Send it to the moon, that should do it!”

But if that wasn’t bad enough, some bright spark had the idea to turn the massive power that was able to be produced by a nuclear reaction into a bomb! “Hooray,” cried the governments, “no-ones going to mess with us now. We are invincible.” And indeed they were.

In 1945, the united states of america dropped two bombs on japan: One on hiroshima, and the other on nagasaki, killing many thousands of people on the ground through the first fireball, and then subsequently, many tens of thousands from the slow and agonisingly painful death of radiation poisoning (*low doses cause diarrhoea and nausea and vomiting and sometimes loss of hair; greater exposure can cause sterility and cataracts and some forms of cancer and other diseases; severe exposure can cause death within hours*). But it stopped the war!

“Hooray!” Shouted the people. “Hooray for us!” Shouted the government. Victory parades were ordered around the globe. “We are the winners!” Shouted the allies. “We have defeated them!”

What the governments were failing to tell people, was that during the second world war, sixty million people died. That’s nearly the entire population of britain now, and guess what folks? Over two thirds of the people killed, were civilians; that is people who were not actually engaged in the fighting directly.

After the victory parades died down, the big winners, russia and america split the world into east and west, and bored with the quiet that peacetime was causing, started the cold war (*a state of political hostility that existed from 1945 until 1990 between countries led by the soviet union and countries led by the united states*) which existed for 45 years! This was a war of ideology, of technical development and espionage, and provided the backdrop for many famous “spy” films and books.

They also spent a great deal of time and money, your money not theirs (it is estimated the united states spent several trillion dollars), developing nuclear weapons – you know, like the ones they dropped on japan, only bigger and nastier – and stuck them in strategic sites all over the world, “just in case.”

They were known as deterrents. “Look, if you fire one at us, we’ll fire ten at you,” and kept the world on the edge of their seats waiting for one of these idiots to press the fire button and unilaterally destroy the world and all that exists in it.

Fortunately, an american ex-movie star, and a russian president were able to sort out their “imagined” differences, and the threat of war went away, much to the army generals displeasure on both sides of the atlantic, I’m sure!

But still the nuclear weapons remained in place, and by now, more countries had developed the capacity to blow us all to bits (if you’ve got one, why can’t I have one?), including the united kingdom, israel, india, pakistan, china, and of course, those masters of diplomacy, the french, with each country “testing” (a euphemism for blowing up part of the ocean or earth) their weapons just to flex their muscles a little bit. You know, kind of like a children’s game!

So here we are in 2008. The cold war has ended, but there are still about 20,000 of these missiles still active, according to some sources, but who knows the real figure? All ready to blow up the world at the touch of a button. And now the countries with the weapons are trying to stop new countries from developing their own, because they’re not responsible enough to have them – like our governments are!

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

But the one thing you *must* remember about nuclear weapons, is that not only did we pay for them, but they were built to “protect us,” do you understand? These missiles were pointed at millions of civilians in other parts of the world, people we had never met, who didn’t care about us, people who were just going about their daily business. People who weren’t our “enemies,” they just spoke a different language.

So who do you think the government were really protecting?

You may remember that they built themselves nuclear bunkers which would save them from the bombs, whereas you and I could fry in the blast, or die a slow death from radiation poisoning.

So who were they protecting? Us? From who? People we had never met, who we had never quarrelled with?

What were they really protecting? The security of the country, that’s what. The system. The hierarchy of power – nothing else. They were not protecting our “way of life,” they were not protecting “freedom of speech” they were protecting themselves from other powerful leaders. To them it was just a game of power wielding. “I’m more powerful than you.”

“No, you’re not.”

“Yes I am.”

“No you’re not.”

Unfortunately, this game could potentially cause us to cease to exist! Some game. But well done for paying for it, because you, and everyone around you, are keeping the world in suspense over whether one day someone is going to come and blow us up. And your money is keeping everyone in fear. Thanks.

Can we trust you?
Of course you can trust us!
We’re the government!

So let me ask you the question again? Who is the government here for? Why do we need them? Why do we waste our hard earned money so that men can play power games? “But they give us roads, and healthcare, and schools...”

But let me ask you this, if we wanted to, don’t you think we could organise all of it ourselves? Could we not maintain the roads? Could we not school our children? Could we not train doctors? In fact with the money we were saving (trillions) on not developing weapons, or spying on people, or maintaining massive armies, we could build something pretty nice!

So how do we get rid of the government? Do we have to have a conspiracy (which is illegal, of course) or do we commit treason? No of course not. We either stop voting, or stop paying taxes! What are they going to do, throw us in jail? All of us? But enough of that subversive talk! I’m not going to overthrow the government, and neither are you. We are much too happy in our little lives to do something which is, after all, “illegal.” Of course it’s illegal, they want to stay in power, and if you live in a democracy you put them there.

Let’s all spy on each other!

Governments are pretty jumpy at the moment, or at least, they tell you they are. They have “elevated” threat levels because of the new threat to the world – “the terrorist” (basically a soldier without an army or a country to back him). He is portrayed as an evil muslim generally intent on destroying “your way of life;” but like all government nonsense, we have found out that a lot of these guys were trained and paid by the central intelligence agency, and other lovely organizations whose (self-appointed) job it is to look after the interests of the country and the world.

But let’s get back to our evil terrorist, who, funnily enough, started appearing more just as the cold war ended (funny that). Now I’m not saying that governments like to be engaged in some kind of conflict at all times because it is good for business; nor am I saying that having potential “threats” to our “national security” is a good way to exert more control on the people by introducing identity cards, biometric (*using*

human physical characteristics (face shape, finger prints, etc.) for identification) authentication, and more random checks on “civilians.” No, no, I wouldn’t ever want to suggest such a thing.

So in this state of heightened security, after 9/11, or 7/7 (an attack in london), the governments have put up more surveillance cameras (to protect us), and they have sent even more spy satellites into space to observe what we are all up to (of course to add to all the other thousands of bits of metal up there doing such dubious tasks as checking how much we are destroying the planet and relaying the data back to us).

You see, we must keep a watch on what everyone is doing; the terrorist is a slippery customer. We must have the world under surveillance at all times. We must protect national security, we must protect the system. We must protect the powerful (oh, sorry, I mean, we must protect the people). So we spy and we spy on each other, and the poor old terrorist is getting the blame for everything!

I’m sure more civilian people have died during the “liberation of iraq” than ever died in the world trade centre or in the london explosions.

Now, I never condone loss of life, but people die, all over the world, every minute of the day, for all sorts of reasons, but unfortunately the united states and the british/australian governments (among others) think their citizens are more important than others. Or is it really the citizens they are concerned about? What do you think?

***We must protect the security of the country
We must protect the system
We must protect the power structure***

I don’t know about you, but I’m not paying for this anymore

I’m pretty sick of this whole fear campaign spread around the world by powerful men in their powerful positions. But I must remember I put them there. I just won’t pay them to control me and the rest of the world anymore. They can throw me in jail if they like, and I won’t vote for them anymore.

Ok, maybe if a party of people were trying to be elected on a ticket of love and compassion for all beings, and gave a guarantee they would disband all power structures, weapons and demobilise (get rid of) all military personnel, then maybe I’d think about it. In fact maybe I’ll start my own party. But then again, I’m easily bribed, so maybe it’s not such a good idea! But do you understand what I am trying to convey to you?

People have managed without government before, it’s not such a big step.

“But there will be chaos in the streets! Who will run the country?” I hear you cry, but we are not talking about reform (*a change for the better as a result of correcting abuses*) here, nor am I talking about replacing the government in some coup! You only have to look at what has happened every time some “freedom fighter” takes over. He becomes just like the man he replaced – maybe worse!

I am talking about a non-existent government, where Man takes responsibility for his own planet, where he works together, not like a world government, but with no government.

“But who will control the violent, who will stop lawlessness?”

But that is just fear talking. The man who is free from fear, needs no government, and you know, we *are* supposed to be the most intelligent species on the planet! Out of chaos there is a natural order that exists. But I am not talking about new ideas for a new world, as ideas come from thought; and as we have discussed many times, thought is limited.

We need to get rid of the spy satellites and the nuclear weapons. We need to dismantle the power structure, not by force, but through insight.

Hey mr national security! Come get me!

If I were a leader or a government official or secret service agent reading this, what would I think? Would I think, we should bring this potentially dangerous individual in for questioning? Would I have me “bumped off” for daring to question the power structure of the land? Would I charge him with conspiracy? What would I do? I want to desperately keep power because I like it. I like the excitement of having control over others. I like my status in the society. I will not give it up for anyone.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Or would I think: “This is no one’s planet. We are all human and we have to co-exist with everything from the trees to the birds and the animals not forgetting six billion other people. What right do I have to impose my will (whether it was voted for or not) on someone else? What right do I have to decide the future of the planet? Who am I? Am I not just human like everyone else?”

Or would I think: “This writer has to be stopped before he starts a revolution and we can’t have that because it will destabilise the country, and we can’t have that. The people must be controlled at all costs.”

Or would I think: “It is I who is destabilising the country and the world by my desire for power, domination, and control over the people.”

Or would I think: “They need us, how would they organise themselves, how would they manage their healthcare and their pensions and how would they protect themselves from foreign invaders?”

Or would I think: “Man has always looked after himself. He needs no control. If he has managed to survive for millions of years without identity cards, biometric scanning, and nuclear weapons, I’m sure he can survive without me.

So, mr president, mr prime minister, mr dictator, mr official, or mr national security, what do you say? Will you choose a different path to the one you have chosen? Instead of controlling the world to feed your desire, will you work with all of us to bring compassion, understanding and love to everyone, without your symbols of power? You will? Fantastic!

We, the people of the world, thank you with all our hearts. Oh, and you won’t be needing your limousine anymore.

I know we shouldn’t look to the past, but I can’t help wondering where we went wrong, where desire took hold in men’s minds, and gave them a lust for power? But if I could, I would travel through time and have a serious talk with Man. You see, we are all responsible for the world today. We help create it every day.

NOW is the time we must create a new path. One that leads away from power and fear, but along the path of the universal towards love. Can we do it? As long as we stop thinking – Certainly!

I welcome you on a new journey, all of you. And be kind to each other. There is nothing better you can give.

[Back to Index](#)

Graffiti

1. *A rude decoration inscribed on rocks or walls*

*You tagged your name a thousand times,
Your mates think you're so cool.
You sprayed buildings and trains,
Carved your name in glass,
You rule this area.
You are the king of graffiti.*

Graffiti is everywhere, isn't it? In our cities and our towns, walls and subways are decorated with "tags" (or names) of the people responsible, usually done with a spray can, something that could not be described as "art," although many attempt to. It's not freedom of expression either, nor is it generally the making of a political statement – that would be legible! It's just a mess.

Other forms of graffiti include tagging glass with sharp objects so that a permanent inscription is made. Graffiti is quick and easy to do, just point the can and spray, although it's not everywhere, is it? You would think if you could do this in a matter of seconds, that it would be on all buildings, given its prevalence in urban environments, but it isn't.

Have a think about the most likely places you would see graffiti. Trains, public toilets, car parks, public elevators, disused buildings, or run down housing estates perhaps, but you almost never see it on buildings of beauty, or new buildings. Why do you think that is?

Perhaps they don't get an opportunity to graffiti them, perhaps the security is too high around them, perhaps people who tag don't go into areas of beauty; perhaps they have a respect for the builders who spent so long putting up the new building; perhaps they appreciate fine architecture; perhaps they are afraid of being fined, or maybe they just tag where other people have done it before.

There could be many reasons why people who spray graffiti choose certain buildings and not others, but one thing is for sure, if you walk around areas that are disused or run-down in any way you are sure to see it everywhere.

If you walk into areas where there is a lot of graffiti, have you ever noticed how you feel? Maybe a little uneasy, a little afraid? Or if you travel on a bus with the windows all scratched and tags everywhere, how do you feel? I feel angry and a little fearful. Angry at the destruction of things which obviously took time and effort to create, and fearful that if the people who did this cared so little for the property of others, what might they do to me?

What would happen if I asked them to stop? Why do I get the feeling that whoever was responsible not only doesn't care what other people think of them, or show the slightest respect for others, or property, but also may use violence if challenged?

***"I don't care about anyone, I don't care about anything.
I'll do what I want, if I want when I want,
If I want to spray that wall,
or tag the glass, what's it gotta do with you?"***

Since ancient times, Man has felt the need to make a statement to let everyone know he was here. From ancient stone age carvings to school children carving their names into their desks, young lovers carving their names into trees, and people carving their names into buses and trains and spraying their names in huge letters for everyone to see. So, is this part of man's desire to leave a mark, or is it just vandalism (*wilful wanton and malicious destruction of the property of others*).

Just last week, my girlfriend and I went to visit some stone age carvings. Although we were impressed by the primitive stick man, bird, and an elk, we couldn't help wondering what we have felt if these had been sprayed on the rocks by some spotty teenager. I am sure that I would have just thought it was a mess, and complained bitterly about the state of society, instead of admiring it as a "work of art." But let's get back to our main discussion!

Let me ask you a question. If you are a vandal (which anyone spraying graffiti really should be called), what do you think about when you are vandalising buildings and public areas? Do you think what you're doing is wrong? Do you think: "If I spray this paint everywhere, this place won't look nice anymore," or do you not think anything? Do you just do it because you want to, to impress your friends, or to leave a mark, or to perhaps make some kind of statement? Maybe you're just a frustrated artist who can't afford canvas and brushes. Maybe you are anti-establishment or anti-authority? Maybe you like the mess you make, and find it aesthetically pleasing, or maybe you're just plain

Antisocial

1. *Hostile to or disruptive of normal standards of social behaviour*

I think if we were sensible, we would define the “normal” standard of social behaviour as just being kind to one another, and not engaging in acts that make the world a worse place to live in. On first examination, graffiti may not seem to fit this definition, as it evidently has nothing to do with kindness, and isn’t killing people, and “normal” behaviour may be seen as conforming to society, which I for one would not suggest as being good for the system! So is graffiti non-conformist? Yes, but not in a way that furthers the progress of Mankind.

I would like you to think about the type of person who vandalises property (and if you are in fact a vandal, maybe you would like to think of the type of person you are too). What image comes to mind? Does the image of a well educated person come to mind, or the image of someone who shows respect for his fellow inhabitants on the earth, or someone who has a good job, or does community work?

On the contrary, your first image is more likely to be a person with a low standard of education. Someone who has had a troubled social background, who may or may not have come into contact with authorities at some point in their life, is probably young, male, and has no respect for others. Someone who may also relish in the fact that people are afraid of him when they see him vandalising property. Stereotype?

All around the world, whether educated or non educated, young males are full of testosterone, full of bravado (*a swaggering show of courage*), with a need to impress their peers. So they show off; to gain status and respect from within their group, and rival groups. They are not so concerned with the wider population. They live in their own worlds, dissociated psychologically from an adult world of responsibility, and ultimately what they see as boredom. They live for excitement, for thrills. They rarely think about the consequences. How often do we see groups of young men tragically killed in a car accident where they have been involved in a race?

I remember all the stupid things I did in my youth, but the one thing I never did was spray permanent mess onto buildings. Not because I was such a well behaved child, or because I cared for the rest of my fellow human beings, or the buildings, but because my peers were never involved in it. I didn’t know one person who was a vandal. Maybe if someone I knew and respected did it, I might have too.

So if you think about it, although I was brought up well, came from an educated family was taught to respect people and property, it was not the reason I didn’t spray graffiti. In my youth I got into trouble with the police whilst drunk and disorderly, drove cars at high speeds with friends in them whilst over the alcohol limit, and went around in big groups shouting in the street making older people afraid.

I cared little for things to do with the adult world. This was my world, and as far as I was concerned, the only world that mattered. I am not saying I was involved in crime, but if I was to see myself now I would say I was highly antisocial, but then again it was kind of cool to be anti-social when I was young.

Children are easily influenced, especially by older children who rebel against their parents and society. They are someone to look up to, someone to emulate, someone to respect., who is not a parent; but it is a shame that instead of directing that rebellion at something worthwhile, they just vandalise property. Maybe because the young mind isn’t fully formed and able to deal with things at a rational level, they use vandalism as a way of venting their frustrations.

Perhaps those involved are just “bad” and should be locked up for the good of society? I’m sure that may be the opinion of anyone who has had their walls tagged a thousand times, or the people who have to clean it off public buildings and public transport every day. One thing I am sure of is that people who graffiti in this way wouldn’t like it if you did it to their property.

If you are a vandal, imagine the fun and satisfaction of vandalising a public bus, or carving your name into the glass of a public telephone box, or spraying your tag on someone’s door. You are cool; you gain respect from your peers; but then you come home and find that someone has sprayed their tags all over your house, and they have scratched their names into the glass of your car, how do you feel? Not so cool now I expect? Probably angry.

You promise to get the people responsible for this! Isn’t it a little paradoxical don’t you think? Like the mafia hit man who swears revenge for his brother being killed in a mafia hit! No one likes to be the victim. So why continually do it?

It takes a lot of work and effort to create brickwork, and it takes time to paint it, but it only it takes a second to ruin it.

In the same way as glass takes a long time to make. First someone specifies the size and thickness, then it is manufactured, then fitted to the train, then finally the train is ready for service, and the first day it is in service, someone ruins the glass forever, by carving their name into it to be cool!

Destruction isn't cool; it just shows that the person involved was using their mind incorrectly. If you know that this process takes this amount of time, but are still insistent on ruining it for others, you are anti-social.

The strange thing is, you want the bus and the train so you can get around, and would complain if the service was removed, but you just can't sit and relax and appreciate the work that went into creating it for *you*, can you? That's right. It was created for *you*, to make your life easier, paid for by all the other people in your city and *you* just can't wait to destroy it.

This is a plea to all people insistent on graffiti. If you want to make a mess of something please buy your own train or bus and destroy it to your hearts delight. Oh, and be sure to etch all the windows in your house and spray graffiti in your bathroom while you're at it! But of course, being anti-social isn't like that. You have to affect other people around you. You can't be anti-social on your own.

**

Unfavourable social background, lack of good parenting, boredom, lack of education. They could all be factors in allowing a young person to be more easily influenced than someone with a more favourable background, but no one is born anti-social. All babies are cute and cuddly. They don't have an anti-social bone in their body.

It is only through a lack of love that the seed takes root. The feeling that you aren't loved, makes you unable to show love; you start to hate other people more, and if you can't take it out on them, you take it out on property. When you start to feel love, the need to be anti-social decreases, no matter what your background or education. *True love can never be destructive.*

Love the environment you live in, even if it is made of concrete. Plant trees and flowers; enjoy natural beauty in your grey urban environment. The worse you feel about the place you live, the more likely you are to hate it, and want to destroy it, thereby making it worse for everyone. You are not the only person who has to live there. Life is hard enough in an urban environment without making it more unliveable by creating such a visual mess.

Let me ask you a question. If you lived by a beautiful ocean, would you want to spray green and red paint over the trees and the beach huts, or would you just want to appreciate the natural beauty? Even if our lives are hard and we have no money, we still need to see beauty every day to appreciate the life we have on this planet. I know that most of you will say it's hard to find beauty in a city, or in a grey housing estate, or on overcrowded public transport. Graffiti just makes this task harder. That's all.

[Back to Index](#)

Grief

1. *Intense sorrow caused by loss of a loved one (especially by death)*

I have never lost anyone close to me. Both my parents are still alive, and the only people I have known who have died were never close to me. Some of you may be wondering how I can write about a topic of which I have no experience, but this is not just about people dying, it's about living.

Around the world, every day, people die, and they are someone's loved one. Even though I do not know them, I know they must be suffering a great loss. When people we love die, we feel as though something has been taken away from us. Not just the person, but a feeling, like part of us has died. And indeed it has, for they were as much a part of you as you of them.

Grieving (*sorrowful through loss or deprivation*) is a natural process, which they say, must be gone through in order for us to achieve resolution and move on in our lives. Failure to allow the grieving process to take place will result in us staying attached psychologically to the person even though they are dead.

How many of you have lost people you have loved? Were you really close to them? Was it your husband or wife, parents, child, or a best friend? If the person was old then we feel like nature has run its course, and death was inevitable, but if a young person, or a child, dies, especially in traumatic circumstances, such as murder, or a terrible accident, it makes it hard to bear – especially for a parent. They know they are not supposed to outlive their children.

In this modern age of medicine, we all assume that we are likely to live at least five or ten years past retirement age, but it didn't use to be like that. Not so long ago the life expectancy of an adult may not be much more than thirty or forty depending on varying environmental factors such as disease or war. Many children died in the delivery room, or in early infancy; some didn't make it past early adolescence.

We should count ourselves lucky that we live to such an old age. A combination of better diet, less war, better clothing and housing, and the availability of medicines has meant we can regularly live past eighty or more – unthinkable up until recent times. And it is with this age in mind that we plan our lives, and the lives of our children. We all assume we will live a long life. That is our first mistake.

**

On the island where I am living right now, the animals have spent the last month giving birth. Foals and lambs have been born, and many sea birds hatched (although many eggs were attacked by predators before they hatched), and I have watched their first few weeks of life with great interest.

Several of the lambs have died, but many more have survived. The chicks seem to be doing well, but again many have died. The strongest and some may say the luckiest have got through the hardest part and now have to concentrate on living.

Every day is a challenge for them, as indeed it is for us. We have no idea what will happen from one day to the next, so to presuppose nature, and arrogantly give ourselves a determined life span, seems remarkably short sighted! So we must remain open to the reality that the outcome of a chain of events can most certainly affect us.

“Goodbye love, I'll see you this evening.”

“Ok, have a nice day, don't work too hard.”

“I won't! I know, let's take the kids out for an early dinner this evening, then maybe a movie.”

“That sounds good, don't be late home jim.”

“I won't. Bye.”

You get into the car, and start the engine. It's a bit chilly so you put the heater on and tune into your favourite radio station. The traffic is quite light as you join the motorway, and you relax. You'll be in work in about forty minutes. You sit thinking about what you've got to do in the office, but suddenly in less time than it takes to blink:

“Oh God, what's happening?”

There is the crushing sound of metal. It all happens so fast. You see bright flashes of light, your world starts spinning upside down. You can't breathe. YOU SCREAM. The pain. You exhale. It is over. Your life ends.

Yesterday... 08.25 am.

“Shit!”

“What’s wrong steve?” His wife asked, waking up with a start.

“Oh, that stupid alarm didn’t go off again; I’ll have to get a new one.”

“Take it easy, you’ll give yourself a heart attack!” his wife called after him as he quickly dressed and ran out to the car.

“Oh no,” he thought, “I’m going to be late again for the second time this week; my boss is going to kill me.”

He put his foot down and got onto the motorway. Suddenly a careless driver cut him up, and he blasted on his horn in annoyance, and the other driver gave him “the finger.” This infuriated Steve even more and he chased after the car, driving erratically until he had pulled alongside, gesticulating wildly at the other driver and swearing until finally he pulled back. This event left him in a real rage, which set him up for the tragic events which subsequently followed.

He got into work late, and his boss was there, as always, to chastise him;

“I’ve got no place in my organisation for someone who can’t even be bothered to get up in the morning!” his boss chided him.

“Yeah, sorry about that, the traffic was bad.”

“Well don’t let it happen again, I’m sick of it.”

Steve trundled over to his desk, grabbing a strong coffee on the way.

“Steve!” his boss called over to him. “I need you to go to one of dave’s customers for a couple of days, he’s called in sick.” Although inconvenient, it would allow Steve to get away from his boss for a couple of days.

That evening in the hotel he decided to have a few drinks to relax. Why was he still working at this company? He hated his boss. He could get a new job any time he wanted, he didn’t need the stress. He would find something closer to home, that way he could spend more time with the family. It might mean less money, but they could cope with that. As he pondered his life, one drink turned into two and three turned into four.

Next morning, he felt suitably hung-over as he got into the car, but also felt remarkably positive after his evening of thinking. As soon as he got back home he would start looking for a new job, then he could tell his boss where he could stick his job. With a wry smile, he indicated to get onto the motorway, and pulled out. For what seemed to be no more than a second there was an incredible noise of crushing metal, then total silence. He closed his eyes for the last time.

Just another pair of regular guys on their way to work. They never knew each other, and probably had nothing more in common than that shared moment in time. Like all events we see as “tragic” (simply *sad*; especially involving grief or death or destruction), we try to work out where we could have done things differently. What if? What if? If only dave hadn’t been ill, then steve’s boss wouldn’t have sent him to see the customer, and the two men might be alive today.

But there is no use trying to re-imagine a scenario again and again to see how you would have done things differently. I will not be so callous to say that if it’s their time to go, it’s their time (after all, these are people who love and are loved), only that in life, nothing is certain.

It is true that even up to the last second before the accident; if either of them had noticed one another, or steve had been caught at the traffic lights, he was so pleased to have got through, just before they turned red, the accident wouldn’t have happened – but it did. No what if’s, no if only’s, just finality. Death. And so starts the grieving process, the remembering, the crying, the missing, the why me, and finally acceptance and resolution, and the moving on with life.

Grief is a very personal emotion, no two people feel the same way. Some people just spend all day crying, whilst others just become introverted. There is no right way to grieve. We grieve because we are attached to someone through love. We do not grieve for people we do not love although we can empathise with them, and we do still show compassion.

Would jim’s wife grieve for steve? Of course not, neither would steve’s wife grieve for jim. In fact, they may hate each other’s husbands for “causing” the death of their loved one, especially if an enquiry finds one at fault. This will give the griever more opportunity to feel angry and hurt at being left and having their husband “taken from them.”

Who do you cry for – yourself or your loved one?

This is a hard question to answer. What do you think? Of course you cry for your loved one, because they are dead, but you are the one who has been left alive. As an old man said to me once, "I want to die before my wife. I do not want to be the one left alive. I do not want to be sad all the time." At the time, I thought it was rather a strange thing to say, but now I see it differently. It is easy to die, but to be left with grief is the hardest thing in the world, especially if, like him, you had spent sixty years together with your wife. But death catches us unawares, and there is no sense in wishing yourself dead, just to save you having to go through, what is, after all, a natural process.

So here you are alive, left, abandoned in this strange, dangerous world. Your protector and lover vanished into thin air. Why did they leave you? How could they do this to you? Suddenly we become selfish, even though death happened to them, not you! We feel aggrieved, let down, disappointed.

"We were supposed to live until we both grew old" you cry.

But we all die. Some sooner, like the lambs just born, and some when they are old and wizened. There is no trick. It is just life. Acceptance of this is the first stage on the journey to resolution, at which time you will be able to look at a photograph of your loved one, still cry, but recognise that *you* are the one alive, and have a responsibility to yourself to keep living, not in pain, but in joy. You are alive!

Everyone who has lost someone experiences great sadness. You will no longer see them laugh, you will no longer feel the warmth of their body next to yours, you can no longer hug them, you can't even argue with them. It is as if your heart has been ripped out. The emptiness, the loneliness, the misery. But this is normal. If you are attached to something the mind will not let go of it easily. Although we have photographs and memories, we want the physical body back. But learning to stand alone is one of the greatest challenges.

For most of us, our whole life is spent with someone else. We have a boyfriend or girlfriend from our teens, then we get married, and even if we divorce, we usually end up with another partner. As a social animal we find it hard to be on our own. But in grief, you learn that, although you miss the person, you also have a life, an independent life, able to be lived in a state of joy. Even if it does feel as if you won't ever be able to face the world again alone.

We don't just grieve when someone dies. We may also grieve for a partner who leaves us, and we may also grieve for children when they leave home. It is not death that makes us grieve; it is loss, and our attachment to the loss. Grief does not exist independently. To understand this better, I want to tell you two short stories.

When people talk about having split up they always talk about the anger and pain during the divorce, but they never talk about it as grief. I have only recently understood that what my mother was going through when my father left us was grief. It went on for several years, and she could not come to terms with her loss. She had been brought up to believe that when you got married, it would be forever, and had never considered in a million years that it wouldn't be permanent. It wasn't my father she felt sorry for, it was herself. She felt sorry wouldn't have him around anymore – how would she cope? Why did he do this to *her*?

She cried and cried for years, she was so ill at times, she would be bent over the toilet being sick, with me supporting her; and that is for someone who not only wasn't dead, but had run off with another woman! What a waste of positive energy. But she didn't see it like that. She was the victim. She had lost something important to her, and that was her "other half."

It is interesting to note that the expression "other half" is used to describe one's partner, as if being without them does not make you whole. It is only when we learn to stand alone, that we will be truly free from our attachment to loss, to learn to be whole on our own, without the dependence on someone else to make us whole.

My mother eventually resolved her grief in exactly that way. She found her independence, filed for divorce, and made a conscious decision to move on and enjoy her own life. After all, my dad was happily enjoying his.

Man's greatest challenge is to stand alone

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

The second story is regarding a great friend of mine, my uncle; my mum's brother. Every year he and his wife came down to stay with my mum for their two week summer holiday, and I always made sure I'd get to see them while they were there. Last summer was no exception.

I was over on the west coast of Ireland working as a chef, and I invited them all over for a week's holiday. As usual, we had a great time, my uncle quizzing me about guitar chords, us playing golf together, sharing a few drinks. They left with me saying cheerio at the airport, but little did I know I would never be able to speak to my uncle again.

Two months ago he suffered a stroke, and fell down the stairs badly damaging his brain. This brought on a form of dementia, that left him, in a moment, in a different world. I went up to see him in hospital a few months ago, and although the face was the same, it was like staring into nothingness. He didn't recognise me and indeed didn't recognise anyone, including his wife and children. He was locked in a world they couldn't access, and he couldn't access their world. This was one of the saddest moments I have experienced. Knowing someone so well, who not only didn't know who I was, had no idea of who he was, or even where he was. My aunt said to me that she couldn't stop crying and asked how you grieve for someone who isn't dead? I told her that the grieving process is the same whether the person is alive or dead. It is our loss we are suffering from.

But it *is* strange to see someone you have known your whole life, sitting there in hospital, completely vacant. For me, knowing he will never know me or speak to me again, and will silently slip into death in years to come, without any last goodbyes, will be a sad moment.

**

As humans, we do not seem to be very well equipped for dealing with sadness. That is why it is so important to speak to someone during this process. Although you can talk to friends and family, there are many trained people who will be able to give you the support you need. I urge you to seek this assistance and resolve the grief that is inside you. You owe it to yourself to rebuild an independent life, a life you can live with total joy, because you never know when it will be time.

Let us not look back on the loss of loved ones with sadness, and statements like: "I wish I had been nicer to them, or loved them more." Don't wait until people die. You are alive now. They are alive now. Together in the moment. Now is the time to show them you love them; to hug them, to show them compassion. Do not wait until it is too late.

If we all spent a little more time being nice to people we would not spend so much time in regret. Celebrate life now. Do not wait until people have passed away. Resolve your differences, share friendship and experiences. Above all, live life to the full as an individual. You are whole, not an "other half." Live as one, and the grieving process may just become a little bit easier.

[Back to Index](#)

Grooming

1. Care for one's external appearance

Some of us like to make sure we are dressed nicely, and look well cared for, whereas others don't care at all. They dress slovenly, have dirty or torn shoes, do not shower often, let their hair get matted, let their fingernails stay dirty and ragged, and wear creased clothes. They may have no money, or they may just not bother with external appearances, thinking that there is more to Man than just nice clothes! Unfortunately, people judge us on how we look, how we smell, and how we carry ourselves.

What I want to discuss with you today is how we got to this point; how early Man, who came down from the trees, has turned into city man, and what, if anything, have been the benefits? If you think Man has existed as he is since the beginning of time, you better start thinking again.

You don't really have to imagine your ancestors very hard, you could just stop grooming for a couple of weeks and you would find out, because you would quickly become them. You may not believe me, but when you throw away your shower gel, razors, aftershave, and stop cutting your hair and your nails and stop washing your clothes, it's will be like stepping back hundreds of thousands of years.

First, your hair would start to grow longer and get more tangled. Your beard (if you are a man) would start to grow, and within a week you would have quite an impressive facial covering. Women would find they actually *do* have hair under their armpits and on their legs when they stop waxing! Dirt would start to accumulate under the finger and toe nails, and they would start to grow; and without doing physical exercise to file them down, they will get longer and longer. It's just like your pet dog, if he walks on abrasive surfaces enough his nails will stay neat, but if he doesn't, they just keep growing.

So here I am, city man, starting to look more like ape man.

I've got long hair, a long beard and dirty long nails. I still wear my pinstriped suit to work, but people are beginning to talk. It doesn't matter that my mind is the same; they are only looking at my external appearance. Now I have stopped using shower gel, deodorant, and aftershave, my smell has become different. I don't smell "expensive." I now have what we call body odour (*malodorousness resulting from a failure to bathe*). It's not that I don't wash. I do shower in water, but the bacteria in my sweat is attached to my clothes now; and whereas in ancient times the sweat would evaporate into the air, it is now trapped.

Because I don't wash and iron my clothes, they are beginning to look more and more creased. There are marks on my underwear from failing to pay enough attention whilst urinating, stains on my shirt from food I dropped, and dirt on my shoes. Pretty soon, people are staring at me at work. Maybe they think I have suffered a nervous breakdown, and maybe they feel sorry for me, but my bosses aren't pleased, and they call me in for a meeting.

"Now listen here, alan" they start, "you know we all think you're doing a wonderful job here, but we just can't have you going around looking and smelling like that, it's disturbing everyone, and we can't have you going out to see clients like that – you'll scare them off! So go home, have a shave, have a nice soak in a fragrant bath, trim those nails, have a hair cut and we'll see you in the morning. Oh, by the way, buy some new clothes. If you decide not to, don't bother coming back to work."

This scenario could happen to any of you. In less than two to three weeks you could find yourself out of a job, because you have allowed yourself to show the world who you really are underneath all that grooming. It really amazes me that the human race is so shallow.

When I go back into work the next day, everything is back to normal. People shout across the office "nice to have you back alan!" or "you smell nice," or "you look nice, that's a nice suit." That is a fictitious example, but if you try it out in real life you will see that this situation will play out almost exactly as I have written it here!

It's a long, long way back to the trees, you think...

If you ask anyone why we place such a high importance on grooming, they will tell you it is because Man is different to the animals, that we live in an advanced civilisation; but you only have to look at the previous example to know we are much closer to our ancestors than we thought. The problem is that human physiology has not kept up with the development of the human mind.

We want to distance ourselves from the idea that we could ever have been like the apes we see in the zoo, and so we put on false scents, and paint our nails. Women wax their legs, dress in fine silks and walk tall in

high heeled shoes.

The signal we are giving out is that we ain't no ape, baby! We are a human being, who has nothing in common with the natural world.

And of course we don't, as we sit dressed in our finest in restaurants and cafe's sipping cappuccinos, with our humour and charm, scented with the exotic, hair coiffed just so, nails clipped, do we? But this isn't who we really are, this is who we have been able to pretend to be thanks to advances in technology and the harnessing of electricity.

Think about it. If there wasn't a company to make shampoo what would you clean your hair with? If there weren't companies making combs, brushes, gels, mousses, and hair-dryers how would you style it? If there weren't companies making shower gel, and perfume/aftershave how would you smell nice? If there weren't factories making clothes, or companies making washing machines, washing powder, fabric softener and oh, how about an iron, how would you be able to dress nicely? If there weren't any companies making underwear or socks or companies making shoes what would you do? Who would you be? If we hadn't invented razors you would all look the same, hairy! Don't worry it's nothing to be afraid of! It's who we really are, fairly hairy big brained apes! Does that shock you? It shouldn't, because despite our desperate desire to leave the past behind, it keeps catching us up doesn't it?

The mirror does lie

Unfortunately, we all live in a bit of a fantasy world. We actually believe we are not descended from hairy apes, and we have had to invent all sorts of things to keep the pretence alive. It has been said that the mirror doesn't lie, but when we look into it, we are seeing the result of thousands of years of desire. Desire to separate ourselves from nature.

It makes me laugh to see all the people walking around in their fashionable clothes (especially women) wearing some oil paint on their face with their hair immaculately coiffed, and perhaps dyed, having spent ages in front of the mirror to achieve this look.

If we were all just to "let ourselves go" for four weeks, maybe we would start to realise something about ourselves – something quite profound in fact. What that something is, I cannot tell you, but you could find out for yourselves in a short space of time. All I can tell you is that what you are seeing in the mirror right now is not real, it is not your authentic self, it is a projection of your mind. You are seeing thousands of years of cultural conditioning reflected back at you.

If you do not wash, or trim, or comb your hair, or cut your nails, is it really *you* thinking you look bad, or is it the psychological bolt-on of comparison? If I leave my nails to go dirty, am I truly worried about the nails, or am I wondering what other people will think of me? If I fail to shave and let my beard grow, or fail to shave my legs, am I truly concerned with the beard or the hairy legs, or am I concerned with how others will see me? This is important, so please go into it with me carefully.

The key word here is conformity. If everyone had long hair and hairy legs, would you be concerned with removing the hair? Of course not! In fact people would look strangely at you if you did remove the hair. You wouldn't fit in, and actually that's all this topic is really about, fitting in. It doesn't matter how you look, if you are healthy, until you start to compare yourself with others.

Man has decided, using his big brain, to wear make-up and to shave the hair off his body. It is for no practical purpose, except cultural. The rich and powerful wanted to look different to the poor workers, so they used their minds to separate themselves. They created clothing, grooming techniques, and accessories, they knew the poor could never afford. They wanted to be looked up to, respected, and if they looked the same as everyone else, that could never happen. After all, who's going to respect you if you look the same as them?

It is still the same today. Everywhere we look we see celebrities looking amazing don't we? They're wearing the most expensive jewellery and clothes, things we could never afford thereby psychologically asserting their status in society.

The suit vs. The overalls

Thinking back to when I worked in business, I remember noticing how the office staff divided themselves from the factory workers. We would come to work in nice suits, ironed shirts, and nice ties with polished shoes, whereas the “workers” would be wearing overalls or something similar.

They looked different to the office staff. They weren’t immaculately dressed, they didn’t smell of expensive scent, and they didn’t need to worry about shaving. Why would they? The work they did was dirty and there was no one to impress. They worked on machines that didn’t care what they looked like, but in the office something different was going on. The office was the place where status was vitally important, where ambition reigned, and outward appearance was part of the game.

Every time I had to go to the factory for something I felt more important, safe in the knowledge I wasn’t one of them. I was someone who was going places! I can remember standing next to a machine worker in my elegant suit and polished shoes, smelling of cologne and comparing myself to him. Here was a man twice my age, who smelt of oil, unshaven, with unkempt hair, who did a “menial” job, and here was I, young and important (or so I thought), and I was sure I was definitely more intelligent than him. My personal appearance was speaking volumes about who I *was*.

Looking back, it all seems so stupid now, but at the time it was of the utmost importance to me. My appearance meant I was above him, and that’s all that mattered. Think about how you look now, how you feel when you are nicely dressed. Try to observe what is going on in that mind of yours. What processes are taking place under all the grooming?

It is sad to think we gauge human beings based solely on how they look, but I don’t think anyone wants a return to nature where we all look the same, and have long hair, scruffy nails, and beards! Grooming has become a part of asserting ones individuality in the world, even though it is just conforming; but in order to truly know ourselves we need to develop an awareness that accepts we are not the grooming. It is just another bolt-on accessory to make us even more psychologically removed from the natural world we inhabit.

I like to look “nice,” and smell “nice,” but it does not make me more human, just more or less like everyone I compare myself to. Think about it, and maybe for just one day in your life, don’t look in the mirror, it’s not who you really are.

[Back to Index](#)

Groups

1. *Any number of entities (members) considered as a unit*
2. *(chemistry) two or more atoms bound together as a single unit and forming part of a molecule*
3. *A set that is closed, associative, has an identity element and every element has an inverse*

It's only natural that we band together in groups, after all, Man is a social creature, and it's pretty hard to socialise on one's own! So as we begin this discussion together, I would like you to think about any groups you belong to. Perhaps you could consider the following groups as a starting point:

- A. Work/school group
- B. Family group
- C. Friend group
- D. Extended family group
- E. Sports club group
- F. Same interest group

As you go through the list, you will notice that you probably belong to a lot of groups, all with their own hierarchies and rules. You may be at the top of one group (say the family group) and the bottom of the other (work group), so you may experience different conflict going on within you. Why am I the boss of this group and the bottom of that group, but don't be too hard on yourself, you can't win 'em all!

Apart from the family group, which includes your parents, you may find it hard to break into other groups, after all, groups are pretty exclusive things, no matter how many people are in them. But eventually, after working your social magic and becoming acceptable to the other members you are in! You will be treated as one of them.

People who would normally ignore you, as just another human, will come up and expressly talk to *you*. They will listen to *you*, and hear *your* ideas, and generally give *you* a forum to air *your* opinions. You couldn't do that if you hadn't joined, could you? You have become a member of the "in-group" (*an exclusive circle of people with a common purpose*), and as long as you share that common purpose, you will continue to be welcomed as a friend.

Let's think about this for a moment. We may see a violent gang of criminals as threatening, and they may instil fear in us, but how do they see each other? Well I would guess, totally different. They are a group with a common purpose (crime), and they will be comfortable in each others company. They will laugh, joke, go out to dinner together, have a couple of drinks, go round to friends houses etc. and their life will seem completely normal.

When they come to rob our banks it's a different story though. "Get your hands up or I'll blow your fucking head off!" "Don't fucking move!" they will scream. Everyone will be terrified and thinking "Please don't kill me, please don't kill me." But after it's over, they will get back to their houses and laugh about the whole thing saying: "Jeez, did you see the look on that guys face when I threatened to blow his fucking head off? Ha ha, nice work today lads, shall we go and have a beer?"

Whatever we think of them, they probably don't think about themselves. You see, we are the out-group and they are the in-group. We are not in their exclusive circle, so we feel afraid of them, of what they could do to us. Do you understand?

Hey you're all right, you're in my group!

Religion is another powerful in-group, out-group scenario. To be honest with you, it doesn't matter about which religion we are talking about; it is the bond between the members we are interested in here.

Imagine you are on holiday in a foreign country, on your own, and you do not know the groups. One day, you are caught in a violent rampage with people shouting death to all muslims. Next to you a (muslim) member of your tour group is violently hacked to death by the mob, and just as you are about to be summarily dished out the same fate, you shout: "Wait! Wait! I am a christian, please don't kill me, I am a christian." Suddenly the group realises you are a member (even though you are not part of the mob threatening to kill all muslims), and someone says "Leave him alone, he's one of us!"

Leave him alone, he's one of us?! It's unbelievable isn't it? The other man who was just hacked to death with an axe was "one of us" too, remember? He is a human! But to the group, the only thing that mattered

was whether he was “in-group” or “out-group.” It didn’t matter what colour you were or how intelligent you were, or whether you were loving or violent. As long as you belonged to the group “christian” then you were like a brother, and it is exactly the same in crime gangs.

If you belong to the smith syndicate, then all other members of the exceptionally violent smith group will treat you like a brother, but if you belong to any other criminal group then you had better watch out, because your body could end up dumped in the river. Do you see? It’s nothing personal. It is only the nature of groups.

So how many in-groups do you belong to? You see it is not for us to decide whether you belong to an “in-group” or an “out-group,” that is your perception, and any group you “belong” to will be an “in-group” and every other group will be an “out-group.” But it must be in the same field.

For example, the smith crime syndicate generally only has problems with other crime groups, they wouldn’t see the catholic church group as an out-group, it wouldn’t make sense. But the catholic church group may see the muslims as an out-group because it is someone who stands in the way of their goals.

In-group, out-group is like two sides of the same coin. Good one side, bad the other. Heads or tails! Is it becoming clearer to you?

Picture any scenarios where you could imagine this taking place in your life? What about when you go to a football, rugby, basketball, cricket match? Who is on the inside? Of course, anyone wearing the same shirt as you, and anyone wearing a different shirt is on the outside. So if it comes time to have a little fight, you know exactly whose on your side, even if you have never met him or her before!

The same goes for war. You are wearing a green uniform. If you see anyone with a green uniform on you will protect them, but anyone wearing a grey or brown uniform you will kill them. It’s all pretty dumb, isn’t it? But that’s the way groups work! As any professional criminal will tell you, “Hey, it’s nothing personal.”

Do you see the stupidity of the group mentality? One day you are wearing a grey uniform and everyone with a green uniform tries to kill you. To them you are evil, and must be destroyed, but don’t worry, everyone else with a grey uniform will protect you.

The next day you decide to defect to the other side. You hand yourself in and ask to join them. After some lengthy interrogation to make sure you are not a double agent, they give you a green uniform. You catch sight of a guy that only yesterday, just narrowly missed killing you. He shakes your hand and says “Hey, buddy, welcome to the team.” But now of course, all the people who yesterday wanted to protect you, now see you as evil and want to kill you. It’s nothing personal though!

One minute you’re in, next you’re out

Work is a great example of being in the in-group. You are thrown together with a load of people you have never met before and you are instantly accepted as one of them.

“Hey, alan, welcome to the team” they said “want to go for a beer after work on Friday?”

“Sure” I said.

And it felt good to be standing laughing and joking with all these people I had only known for less than five days. If I had been in the pub on my own they would have ignored me. I could have stood on the outside laughing along with them but soon, someone would say, “Hey, who’s that guy, does anyone know him? Excuse me, this is private, ok?” And I would have to walk off to the corner alone again.

But no, I was in, people were listening to my stories, sharing their own, gossiping about other members of staff, and although I didn’t even know them, I laughed along, because I could. I belonged. And it was nice to belong.

People said “good morning,” and “how are you, alan?” and although I didn’t have an important job, boy did I feel important as I walked through those doors every morning. I joined in weekday social activities, went out at the weekend with some of the guys occasionally, I even joined a five a side football team, and also had a “little” on-off affair with one of the secretaries there! Life was good. Until one day, I was called into the human resources office and my boss and a couple of other bosses were there.

“I am sorry but we are going to have to let you go alan”, they said.

“Uh, oh, when?” I said.

“Effective immediately”

“Why?”

“You have not being fulfilling your contract properly and we gave you plenty of chances”

“What? I said. “How can you, that’s really unfair!”

And there I was, a fully fledged member of the in-group, football player, ten pin bowler, friday night drinks man, wooer of the ladies in the sales department, being marched out of the building by my boss! No one said a word.

Over the next few weeks I called some of the guys, and although they commiserated, they didn’t seem to be that interested in me anymore.

“Shall I see you guys for drinks next friday” I asked one of them.

“Err... I don’t know erm... if we are going out on friday, we’ll call you if we are.”

I even tried calling the little on-off secretary I had been seeing, but she wouldn’t return my calls. I couldn’t understand it. Why were they avoiding me? “I thought they were my friends” I thought to myself, and I was more than a little hurt.

When I did eventually see them on one friday night after work (they just happened to be in the same pub as me), everyone said “oh hi alan, all right?” But I quickly realised I was never going to be invited in to the circle to join in with the laughter again. So I just finished my drink and left. After all, it was nothing personal. I just wasn’t in the in-group anymore.

So how many of you have stories like that? What, am I the only one? Anyway, it is clear to see that what we call “friendships” are mostly little more than in-group affiliations. But don’t take my word for it, test it out for yourselves.

Is anyone a true friend?

So how do we know if someone is really our friend? Given that group relationships come and go, are there any people we can really call friends, people who are there for us through thick and thin, who don’t stop being our “friend” when we stop being a christian, or going to the tennis club, or stop working for a certain company? Well, there’s usually your parents, who although say they’re your friend, are really there for you because they love you, they brought you up, and they don’t want to see anything bad happen to you, or see you unhappy.

But sometimes, we find a special someone who is there for us, and we are there for them with no strings attached. Not because we are married to them, or share a common purpose, but because we are connected in a bond that is greater than all groups. That relationship is something to be cherished, because believe me, they don’t often come along, if at all.

**

Man may be a group animal, but at heart he is still an individual; and learning to stand alone, when all others are joining groups just so they can “belong,” is one of the hardest things you will ever have to do.

It is so important that Man thinks for himself, and does not just conform to belong. That is how we have seen some of the worst atrocities in the world carried out. Not because people necessarily believed in everything they were doing, but because they were just following the group. Do you understand? We must learn to leave the groups we belong to and stand alone.

It doesn’t mean socially isolating ourselves, just not throwing ourselves head first into belonging, without first investigating what it means to you (and the rest of us) to belong, and what it will mean for you and for others, if you are forced out. You must investigate this.

As humans, we just can’t seem to be honest with people or be loyal to them, can we? Just when we think we can trust people they let us down. And let’s face it; most of us are pretty good at letting people down. But as individuals who belong to the group called homo sapiens, we must try to find a way to be loyal to people, whoever they are, to support them, give love, guidance and compassion, and not falter in our friendship. That is what it is to be a true member of the group – not some temporary relationship with some people from work. It’s time to start thinking outside our little groups and thinking of the impact we are having on the big group. Us.

[Back to Index](#)

Guilt

1. *Remorse caused by feeling responsible for some offence*

I'm sorry, I'm so very sorry. I feel really bad. I didn't mean...

Like many things in life, I often ask myself, is guilt real? If so, where is it and what is it? To understand guilt, we have to go into the mind of someone who has done something “wrong” (*contrary to conscience or morality or law*), or who has voluntarily carried out an action he later regretted.

Before we start this discussion, we have to realise straight away that guilt can be avoided. Not by obeying the law, but by carrying out right action. Action that is line with the three key principles of compassion, love and empathy. Go with those, and you can’t go wrong. The end.

But life isn’t like that, is it? We’re not all “perfect,” and in fact, none of us are, or ever will be. Perfection does not exist, except as opinion.

Take the woman, who has been married for 25 years to the same man. She has brought up a beautiful family of three children, worked hard, and looked after her husband. Through sheer chance, she meets a man at a class she is attending, and they go out for a couple of drinks together.

Before long, a full blown affair is in swing, and they are seeing each other a couple of times a week. The affair isn’t serious, but for the woman, this is the most alive she has felt in years. She enjoys the passion and the clandestine meetings. She enjoys this double life she is leading, and although she doesn’t want to hurt her husband, he had an affair several years ago, “so this makes us even.” The affair carries on for several months, until she decides to end it.

She hadn’t seen the man for over six months, and didn’t think about him, but what she did think about all the time, is how she cheated on her husband. The lies she told to cover up her actions. Having sex with a man she barely knew! How terrible the pain. She was truly suffering now. Why had she done such a terrible thing, how could she? After all her husband had done for her.

She was beside herself with guilt. She couldn’t go on sleeping in the same bed with him now, not after all she had done. She wasn’t worthy of his love. How could he bear to look at her? She was a despicable woman and she deserved all she got now. She didn’t deserve any more happiness in life after her betrayal of the man she married. How she cried every night. How she chastised herself for being so stupid. How could she, an intelligent woman, who had brought up three children so well, have turned into a common whore. That’s all she thought of herself. What was she thinking? What had happened to the mild mannered community minded woman had been? How had she turned into this other woman?

Every day she tortured herself about the affair. One minute deciding to tell her husband, the next thinking about running away. She even contemplated suicide...

In the end, after much deliberation, she told her husband. How did she feel when she told him? Was she scared? How did she feel afterwards? Relieved?

It is incredible the pressure we put ourselves under isn’t it?

Guilt is not real. We can’t see it, we can’t touch it, and no one can show it to us. It is something which sits inside the mind, but eats away at us every day. Why?

Most people in the world have a conscience (*conformity to one’s own sense of right conduct*), and we know when we breach it. That’s where guilt comes in. It’s amazing isn’t it, that our own mind would make us feel so bad about something it had thought was perfectly acceptable to do at an earlier period.

If the woman had considered the affair using right action before embarking on it, there would be no guilt. She obviously believed in the past that having affairs was wrong, and when she herself embarked upon one, her conscience let her know it was wrong again, and again, and again, until finally, she had to own up to it.

Some people feel so guilty about wrong action, that they do indeed kill themselves. How sad that someone actually terminates their own precious life, because they are worried about what people will say or do.

The way forward is right action. Where your conduct follows what you believe is right or wrong. If you believe it is right to have an affair, you will have one with no guilt, but this topic isn’t about right and wrong, that is up to you the individual to decide. If you decide it is wrong to have an affair and have one anyway, your ever present censor (*someone who censures or condemns*) will be ready to beat you (or your mind anyway) up for as long as it takes. That is why murderers and others who have committed serious offences against people sometimes have a need to own up. They just can’t bear the pain in their minds anymore.

So guilt is real. Very real. Even though it is invisible to others, it is as real to the sufferer as a burn on the body. It is inescapable. You cannot run away from it, it is always with you. Even if you travel a million miles

through space. You take it with you.

“So what you’re saying is confess and everything will be all right, is that correct?”

Well, actually you may feel better for confessing your “guilt,” but the action has already taken place. Someone is dead. Someone is hurt. Someone is crying. It is too late to go back. You can only go forward.

Most people don’t confess, because they don’t want to lose face (*status in the eyes of others*). They don’t want people to know they have done something which wouldn’t be approved of by their peer group (if your peer group is into mugging and robbing people, you may not feel any guilt, and may even feel proud of what you have done), family or wider society.

We all want to put on a public face. We want people to think we are one type of person, usually an upstanding (*morally admirable*) member of the community. That’s why we feel so guilty when we have done something not so admirable. We don’t want to get found out and so lose our status.

If you want a good example, think politicians or priests. In our newspapers in the uk, there are constant scandals involving people who put on a morally admirable front, only to do the complete opposite when no one’s looking. Why do they do such things? Because it is the real them behind the mask of morality who is sleeping with prostitutes, taking drugs, going on alcohol binges, taking bribes, being corrupt or engaged in some other unpleasant business.

Doing these things does not make them bad people, but when the difference between the authentic self and the projected self gets too big you get guilt. If your authentic self is corrupt and the outward projection is corrupt, no problem, well at least for you regarding guilt. If your authentic self is a murderer and your outward projection is a murderer, no problem again regarding guilt.

Now I happen to believe that the true, or authentic self, of every individual, is a loving, kind, compassionate one, and that everything else is a projection. That is why instead of worrying about how to fix guilt. i.e. so we can do things that are against our better judgement and not feel guilty, we should be concentrating on developing our authentic self.

Guilt is a pointless exercise, don’t you agree? Let me ask you a question: If you could get away with things without feeling guilty, would you do them? If you could get rid of a love rival without anyone ever finding out and without ever feeling guilty would you do it? How about robbing a bank? No one will ever find out and you won’t feel guilty...Well? Would you?

Right Conduct

It’s not an ethics quiz we are playing here, we are trying to discover whether it is the guilt that is the problem, or the action. Most people are more worried about the guilt. They are happy to take a risk with the action and hope they won’t get found out. Is that a fair assessment?

I have lied (on several occasions) to previous girlfriends about where I have been, when in fact I was with someone else. I saw the opportunity, took it, enjoyed it, and worried about the consequences later. It was only when it was brought up in conversation with my girlfriend that I started to feel guilty. Not because I was really truly sorry, although maybe I thought I was, but knowing it was only a matter of time before I was caught.

“Why did I do that?” I thought, “you’re so stupid alan, if only you hadn’t slept with that girl.” The closer I was to being caught the more guilt was piled upon my mind.

Have a think about any actions you have felt guilty about for a moment. Can you remember why you felt guilty?

Remember the woman at the beginning of this topic? She wasn’t feeling guilty while she was having passionate sex with her lover, was she? On the contrary, she was enjoying herself! It was only when the thought of what the consequences *could be*, that she started to feel guilty.

Guilt is nothing more than the cost you must pay for having done something against your better judgement (and you have a chance of being found out), in the same way that a hangover is the cost you must pay for drinking too much, and having a great time at the party the night before. Actually you may feel guilty about having drunk so much as well!

So what is right conduct? Is it something you learn from your parents, your teachers, or your peers? Inevitably, you do learn from these people, but who’s to say what right conduct is? The only way to learn this

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

is from yourself. Through observing yourself in action.

Guilt is an unnecessary encumbrance (*Any obstruction that impedes or is burdensome*). We need to throw off the shackles of guilt, and live in minds free of pain, for that's what guilt is; pain. A constant reminder that there is something you have done which is unresolved.

So from today onwards I will not let guilt into my life, how about you? But to do that, I must change the way I think, and the way I act. In order to bring about this guilt free life, we must make a *big shift* in thinking, and in action. There is no time to consider it, you have to make this decision right now. Do I want to live my life without guilt? I certainly do.

Make the decision and commit here and now, to live according to compassion, love and empathy. That is all you have to do. The rest will take care of itself. There is no time to think about this, it is done. The shift has been made. You are now guilt free, ok?

Once again, I hear you sitting reading this, thinking "What was he talking about? I don't feel any different, I'm sure I'll do something that will make me feel guilty again." But what kind of authentic life is that you will be leading? You are already predicting that (and listen to the words) you will *go against yourself*. How is that actually possible? Can someone please explain it to me? You are one person are you not? You have one brain. One body. One Mind. Where is the separation? Who is going against who?

If you commit a "wrong action," why is it wrong? If you do it, it must be a right action! Maybe not for the others you are affecting, but for you it is right. It must be or you wouldn't do it. There is no point in us discussing what is right and wrong again and again. Right conduct is easy. Wrong action is easy. It is your choice. But only one of those comes with a "lifetime guilt free guarantee." Which one will you choose?

Just one last hint...

- A. If you think it is wrong it probably is.
- B. If you worry it might be wrong, it probably is.
- C. If someone else says it's wrong, go back to A.
- D. Right action is always right.
- E. Guilt is a waste of a precious life.

[Back to Index](#)

Guns

- 1. A weapon that discharges a missile at high velocity (especially from a metal tube or barrel)*

*You're the man
You stand above me
Trigger at the ready
Such power in small hands
You are god and I am no one*

Things have changed quite a lot since Man invented the gun. Gone are the days of hand to hand combat where you weren't sure if the person you were attacking or defending yourself from was stronger than you. No longer do you have to worry that they may be a black belt in some dangerous martial art; the gun levels the playing field, and gives you, the holder of the gun, immense power.

You feel powerful, psychologically, as well as physically, safe in the knowledge that you can defend yourself from attack; and if you are that way inclined, attack someone yourself. In the past, there was always a chance you would lose a fist fight or a knife fight, but now you don't even have to get close to someone to kill them.

You stand, you pull out the loaded gun, and gently squeeze the trigger. Blam! The explosive charge sets the bullet off leaving the gun at high speed; the pointed metal projectile spinning through space with no thought, no intention, no desire. The thought rested with the one who pulled the trigger, it might have been self-defence, wilful attack, an accident, a desire to kill, a need to rid the world of someone who you believed to be evil, a criminal trying to leave the scene of the crime, or the police shouting "Stop or we'll shoot."

But the bullet has no such thought; it is but shaped metal, no bigger than a finger, yet capable of destroying life wherever it is sent. Suddenly it finds its target, a human being; and in a micro-second, the metal pierces first the clothing, then it starts to tear inside the flesh, shattering bone where it finds it, pulverising organs indiscriminately. The victim falls. Their breathing becomes shallow, blood pours from the hole in their skin, their body desperately trying to keep them alive. They are but a short time from death. You stand over them, and fire again.

The human is no more; the bloodied flesh is all that remains. You did that. You killed him. For whatever reason he is now dead. He may have stolen from you; you may have stolen from him; he might have been a danger to society. I'm sure you will be able to justify it.

How many people die this way? And it's all thanks to one man's invention. One human thought which came up with a hand held killing machine that is now in use in every country in the world. Criminals use them against innocent people, innocent people use them against criminals, and the police and army use them against everyone. In the united states especially, gun ownership is seen as a fundamental human right!

Guns have one purpose. To kill. Do you understand that? To deprive another of his or her life. That is their *only* purpose.

I've seen the police carrying guns in most countries, and how powerful they look. The holster on the belt says "Don't mess with us, otherwise you die."

Guns generate fear in others; they make the holder almost invincible, no matter how small they are. It may make the general public fear to do anything wrong in case they are shot, but it doesn't really stop those who are determined does it? It just means they get a gun to shoot back at the police.

Where will it end? Will we all be forced to carry a gun "just in case"? Are we so afraid of each other? Do we really want to cause each other so much harm? I am filled with sadness as I write this topic, that our species, homo sapiens, has ended up just using our brains for destruction. Before anyone tries to justify gun use, let me remind you, that the ends can never justify the means. We want rid of all gun crime in our city. So what do we do? We shoot the criminals! And the cycle continues...

I understand that people are afraid. They are so afraid of something "bad" happening to them, that they decide to arm themselves. And what happens when someone tries to attack them? It's kind of obvious. They shoot them dead! Of course they were doing it in self-defence, so that's all right, isn't it? In any case the law would probably agree with you, and the police would be happy that there's one less criminal out on the street.

But what is this really about? Perhaps this is good vs. evil. The man who goes to church every week, and is a "model" citizen (mr good), is attacked in his home by a burglar (mr evil), and shoots him in the head, killing him instantly. This is clearly a case of good overcoming evil wouldn't you say? Except mr good killed a man. He fired the projectile that span into space before ripping through the flesh of mrevil.

I can hear many of you thinking you would do the same, given the same circumstances. But the more we think like this, the more guns we will carry, and the more people will die unnecessarily. Actually I feel sorry for the burglar, he is not evil (for me there is no such thing as good and evil), he is just misguided in his own thinking. The same goes for anyone who thinks that the only way to live is to steal ultimately worthless possessions from others.

Scenario 1

I have used the scenario of the bank robber in another topic, but this time imagine he has decided to steal from an armoured car. He knows the guards are armed, so he arms himself. The van stops, he pulls down his mask, jumps out of the car and runs towards the guard. He shouts “Get your fucking hands up where I can see them;” but unbeknown to him, there is another guard to his left. The guard removes his revolver silently, aims, and fires. The robber goes down. Hooray! What a hero the guard is. He has saved the precious money! The wonderful, amazing bits of paper he is prepared to kill for. The would be thief lies dead in the road; blood oozing from his wounds. The guards congratulate each other for saving the money.

Scenario 2

The robber pulls down his mask, jumps out of the car and runs towards the guard. He shouts “Get your fucking hands up where I can see them,” but this time he sees the guard to his left removing his revolver; he aims and fires. The guard goes down. He grabs the money from the guard and runs back to the car. What a result! He got the money! The wonderful amazing bits of paper he is prepared to kill for. The guard lies dead in the road; blood oozing from his wounds. The thief drives off quickly, happy to have completed his task.

***Guns are so quick. No time to think. Use it if you have to. Just like a computer game.
Except this time it's real blood, real screaming, and real agony.***

So now we all know that the almost self-explanatory purpose of guns is to kill. They do not discriminate between right and wrong. They just do exactly what they are designed for. K-I-L-L. So just before we finish this topic, is it possible that someone can answer a question that has been troubling me for some time? Why do they keep making them?

The leaders of most “civilised” countries want peace and harmony in society, so why do they permit companies to keep making guns? It seems like a no-brainer to me.

You want to cut gun crime, but you arm the police, allow companies to manufacture guns, and in some countries allow people to buy them legally. Surely you don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure out that if people have them, they're going to use them. It's like trying to get rid of cocaine on the streets and then allowing people to make it legally and then allowing people to buy it. Somewhat contradictory, wouldn't you say? But maybe it's just me!

People go to work every day in gun factories throughout the world, making the bullets and the guns that fire them. How do they feel about what they are doing? Do they think they are doing work to further peace and harmony in the world? Who do they think they are helping? Perhaps to them it's just a job, a way to pay the bills and nothing more. But I can't see that. Surely they must recognise that the output of their work may be ending life somewhere, whether used by the police for “good,” or criminals for “evil.”

How proud they must be, as another “piece” rolls off the production line, ready to be bought for a few measly pounds. How proud the owners of the gun factories must be to see such booming sales. I can see the boardroom presentations now.

“Due to the unprecedented levels of fear products have created, sales are steadily increasing. As we have seen in the last quarter, a high level of gun attacks has meant that more people are arming themselves against gun attacks resulting in increased sales.”

The other directors applaud the sales director and give him a big fat bonus. After all, this is strictly business.

Man has always been violent, but before guns, people had a chance to survive, now it's over without any contact. After all, what use is thirty years of martial arts training against a skinny youth armed with a 9 mm automatic pistol?

Guns redefine power. You no longer need muscles; with just one tiny movement of the index finger you can release a bullet. For me, that's a pretty scary thought, but for some people, it makes them feel powerful, it gives them a super strength they never knew before. It makes people fear them, respect them and obey them. The gun compensates for feelings of inadequacy and powerlessness. It redefines who they are, or at

least who they want the world to think they are.

Don't worry it's just a game...

Have you ever owned a gun? Have you ever fired a gun? I have. I don't know when the first time was, but it was probably when I was a small child! Not a real gun of course, but a "toy" gun, bought for me by my parents. I used to love playing "cops and robbers" and other children's games. "BANG BANG! YOU'RE DEAD," we would cry or "STOP OR I'LL SHOOT."

Looking back it all seems so innocent, just children playing with toys and their imaginations. It's just a bit of harmless fun, isn't it? "Why should we stop children having fun?" I hear you say. "It's just make believe. It's not real." But it is real.

The children may know they haven't really killed someone, but how are we supposed to teach our children to live a peaceful life when we actively encourage them to simulate violence? Is there not enough violence in the world already without using violence as a play activity?

I used to play "cowboys and indians," which in the real life past, was american cowboys brutally killing native american people, and the native people retaliating by brutally killing the cowboys. Nice game! How about cops and robbers, where I pretend to be a policeman and I chase you and kill or capture you?

What sorts of games are we teaching our children? How can we expect their minds to be repulsed by violence when it is actively promoted everywhere! Please think on this for a moment.

I cannot understand why we are encouraged to play these games for although we adults see them as pure fantasy, the only difference between them and reality is that the guns can't kill or harm anyone, the thought behind the game is the same: "BANG BANG. YOU'RE DEAD."

Parents may argue that it's a violent world out there anyway and this is just a harmless bit of fun, but since when has violence – real or pretend – ever been truly fun? Maybe you think you're preparing them for adult life, but let me ask you another question. How can we expect to break the cycle of violence if we are indoctrinating children from a young age that violence is acceptable?

Children's minds are like sponges, and they soak up everything from their parents and other teachers. If a child is told that it is ok to pretend to kill someone, why wouldn't they think it's ok? Admittedly most people who play cowboys and indians do not grow up to be mass murderers, but the seed is planted.

It's time to unplant the seed

Maybe there is someone to blame for all this. Maybe it's mr colt who invented the revolver in the 1800's; maybe it's the parents who let their children pretend to kill people; maybe it's the computer games companies who make violent computer games; or maybe it's the governments who say it's ok to defend yourself with a gun. It could be the man who works in the factory making bullets who is to blame. It could be that educators are to blame, or the american media companies who insist on making the most violent tv and films possible, or perhaps our ancestors are to blame, or maybe it's just that having learned about violence and guns we want to continue to be violent because actually we get a buzz out of it! Let me tell you about my limited experiences with real guns.

I first bought an air gun which fired real pellets when I was about fifteen or sixteen. The first thing I remember was how it felt. Somehow the handle just fitted my hand like a perfect glove. It seemed to be a natural extension of me, and I felt powerful. I sat in my back garden shooting at anything. Tin cans, the fence, the trees, when suddenly I saw a pigeon sitting on a branch. I fired at it and hit it I think, but in any case, it carried on flying so I don't know if it died or not.

Over the next five years or so, I had other air guns and (very) occasionally would fire at friends feet if they were visiting, resulting in lots of laughter.

The first time I fired a real gun was very different. My friend had been in the army and was pretty obsessed with guns. He took me into the woods and showed me how to load up a 12 bore shotgun with two cartridges. He then hung a piece of tissue paper on a branch and asked me to fire at it from many metres

away. I was shocked that it was completely destroyed afterwards. “That’s what it will do to your insides if it hits you,” he joked.

We then proceeded to go rabbit hunting with two other friends. “If anything moves” he said, “pull the trigger, and make sure it’s dead, after all we don’t want to have to go after it to kill it. We can’t just leave a wounded animal to die.” I thought it strange that on the one hand he was happy to violently take the life of another animal, but was concerned it shouldn’t suffer. (I think having its life violently ended is suffering enough, don’t you agree?)

We walked for ten or fifteen minutes when suddenly something shot out in front of me.

Without a thought, my “hunter’s instinct” took over, and I pulled the trigger. Bang Bang, went the shotgun as it recoiled against my shoulder.

Someone shouted over: “Did you hit it alan? Where is it? Did you kill it?”

I walked over to a rabbit lying on its side, still except for very fast breathing. Its eyes were still. Its legs were still. I stood there transfixed, unsure what to do. “If it’s still moving kill it” shouted my friend. So I reloaded my gun pointed it at the rabbit, kind of looked away and fired. The rabbit stopped breathing.

My friend came over and picked the rabbit up by its back legs and said “This things pumped so full of lead it’s got more holes in it than a colander. No ones going to want to eat that.” Everybody, including me, laughed, and he tossed the dead rabbit into a bush.

*Such big men, you stand
guns raised skyward
waiting for the moment,
then watch birds, graceful
fall silently to earth*

That’s all I remember about that trip 11 years ago, but I never picked a gun up again. The power of the shotgun really scared me. I, a weak human being killed another creature, for what? Sport? Having a laugh? Having a sunday morning out with the lads before the pub opened for lunch?

I was utterly disgusted with myself, and still am, for taking the life of that rabbit. Up until then, playing around with guns was never going to really hurt anyone, but here was I, holding the power of life or death in such small hands. How was it that our worlds collided?

We both got up on sunday morning and had breakfast. The rabbit had no plans for the day really, I would guess, but I did. Shooting in the morning, followed by drinks in the pub, followed by a meal at my friend’s house, followed by an evening at the pub. All in all, a fun day out. The rabbit didn’t know my plans. He just carried on with his daily routine until he walked across my path at the exact time I was walking past with murder on my mind. An unfortunate meeting for both of us. He, because he lost his life, and I, because I had to carry the guilt around with me for many years.

Do I blame the gun manufacturer or my friend for giving me the gun, and urging me to go shooting with him? I could, but ultimately the responsibility lies with me. I chose to go that day. I chose to load the shotgun. I chose to pull the trigger. Everyone has a choice. I chose never to pick up a gun again.

Guns: Tools of the mind

What is a gun? It could be a pistol or a rifle, automatic or manual. It could fire pellets like my air gun, bullets like a rifle, or cartridges that spray small round balls everywhere when fired, like a shotgun. They are made of metal, have a firing pin, and sometimes come with a silencer. That is about the sum of my knowledge of guns.

I know they are used by different people worldwide. Terrorists, armies, criminals, policemen, householders, jealous lovers, mass murderers, hunters, and sportsmen. I know you don’t have to get close to the person in order to hit them; in fact some rifles are able to fire bullets in excess of a mile. That means I can sit and pick out my target without ever having to see their face except through a telescopic sight. The result will be the same (shattered bone and ripped open flesh), but the effect on the shooter will not. Detachment is the key word here.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

In fact, the gun removes any kind of physical connection, unlike stabbing someone which means feeling the blade going in, or strangling or punching someone to death, which requires a physical connection with the hands. That's why shooting someone is easier, because you don't get the intense emotions associated with hand to hand combat where you and your opponent (or victim) are exchanging energy constantly.

With a gun, there is a coldness like the metal it is made from, a non-emotional tool for getting what you want. Whether it is to kill an enemy of the country, or kill a man for his wallet, it makes no difference to the gun. It is always ready to do your bidding. The bidding of your mind.

So what I want to talk to you about now is what thoughts appear in your mind that allow for the possibility of using a gun. Let's start off with a few examples to get you going shall we? How about food, revenge, government sponsored war, anger, paranoia, disease of the mind or robbery?

BETRAYAL: You see the man with your wife. You feel the anger rise up inside you. You feel the betrayal, the lies, the dishonesty, and your ego cannot take it any longer. You feel hurt, confused, and angry. You confront them in bed, raise the gun, and fire.

WAR: You have the enemy in your sights. You know he is your enemy, because your government told you so; and because he's wearing a different uniform, you do not question, you aim the gun and fire.

FOOD: You see the animal, standing in the forest. You want to eat meat so you raise your gun and fire.

ANGER: He's said some horrible things about you, you can't listen to them anymore, he's hurting your self-esteem, you're not going to take that. You raise your gun and fire.

DISEASE: You hear voices in your head; they are telling you to kill her. The only way to silence the voices is to do it. "Go on, do it," the voices urge, and you aim your gun and fire.

GREED: I want your wallet, and your car keys. Give them to me right now or I'll kill you. The man refuses so you raise your gun and fire.

CONTROL: The man will not conform to society, he is a trouble maker, he is stirring up other people, who may start to question the regime as well. He needs to go. You set out to find him. You find him, aim your gun, and fire.

REVENGE: He killed your brother. Now he is out of prison, he must pay for causing you to suffer. You follow him home one night, stand silently behind him, raise your gun and fire.

FEAR: You hear a noise downstairs. You reach for the drawer by your bed and remove the pistol. It's dark as you creep down the stairs: "Who's there" you call. Suddenly you see a man hiding in the dark, you raise your gun, and fire.

Shall I continue? There are a hundred other examples of times when the mind will reach for the gun, which is the ultimate silencer of life. Can you think of a scenario, where if you had a gun, you would use it? You may think not, but given the right situation you just might.

I say you might, because without the right thinking processes in place, there is always a chance, a slim chance, that you feel justified in terminating a life.

The key words we need here are compassion (*a deep awareness of and sympathy for another's suffering*) and love. If we cultivate compassion for others and develop love for everyone on the planet, no matter what their background or thinking we can start to put the guns down and the manufacturers out of business.

I have often contemplated writing the following letter.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

To: A. Global Gun Manufacturer

21/11/07

Dear sir

My name is alan, and I am a human being like yourself. Whilst I appreciate that you and your family need to eat, I have become increasingly concerned that you are not in a business that actually helps – let alone furthers – the human race. I would like to ask you why that is.

Maybe you don't care that tens of thousands of people are killed by small arms fire every year. Maybe you know people want to kill each other, and you realised they needed someone to help them "facilitate" it, thereby providing a very valuable public service? Maybe you have a great awareness of the need for population control, and given that most people in un-developed countries do not use contraception, have come up with an ingenious way to keep the numbers down?

Given you probably know that I was not being serious in my last two statements, and you know I am aware that you are just in it for the money, answer me one question. Do the words love and compassion mean anything to you?

Do you realise you are helping people to become killers? You may say you do not fire the weapons, but deep in your heart you sincerely hope people become violent, because, if they all become peaceful, then you may have to sell your mansion and your ferrari, and you wouldn't want that would you?

So given that I know you want violence to continue, in order for business to boom, why don't you do the world and everyone in it a favour, and turn your attention to making products that benefit the world, not destroy it?

Yours sincerely

alan orr

A plea

Many people have said to me that guns are essential to ensuring the peace and stability of the world, but I have to disagree. Guns make the world violent, by giving people, who need help to work through their problems and their thinking, a one-handed outlet for their emotions.

People are affected by the desperate psychological need for status, power, and greed amongst other things, and guns help them to fulfil these desires. You may also say you have a weapon for self-defence, and if you don't have one, a robber may kill you, but that is your need for power over the robber, in the same way he has a gun to have power over you. He might try to kill you, that's true, but keeping a weapon "just in case" just perpetuates the violence. After all, if you have a gun, you are already planning for violence to take place; maybe not today or tomorrow, but some time in the future.

So give up your guns. Break them right now. Take a stand for humanity. Show you care what happens to the world by sending a letter to an arms company. Ask your friends to show some compassion please, and most of all, please don't condition your child into believing that guns and gun play is an integral part of the human race, it isn't. The place for guns to stop is with every new born child.

We need to start to put guns behind us. That means no toy guns, no cops and robbers games in the school yard or computer games in which the only objective is to "kill" things.

I can hear some of you laughing saying things like "You'll never get people to do that," or "they're just harmless kids games, I think you're wrong," and that's ok; but please, I beg all of you to start to show love to each other, as humans belonging to the same species, and stop using guns.

This appeal also goes out to anyone who works in a gun factory anywhere in the world. You are helping Man destroy Man. Please find other work. You may be poor and need work to feed your family but believe me, thanks to the work you do millions of people will suffer. Think about it. We use guns because they are there, not because we need them.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Let us start to use our amazing minds to get what we want not by ripping flesh apart with metal, I can only think we will surely destroy each other, if we do not – which may be good for the arms businesses, but bad for the human race.

Whose side are you on, a greedy faceless corporation, or all of humanity's? If guns were necessary, we would have evolved with them already built in.

The choice is yours.

[Back to Index](#)

H

Happiness

1. *State of well-being characterized by emotions ranging from contentment to intense joy*
2. *Emotions experienced when in a state of well-being*

I just want to be happy!
Is that too much to ask?

I want you to think back to a time when you were happy. I mean really happy. When was it? Was it when you were a child? Was it when you first fell in love? Or was it sometime more recently, like when someone bought you a really expensive present, or you went on a “dream” holiday? Maybe you got a promotion which came with more money, or maybe when you had a child? That is what we are here to find out!

According to my mother, I was never a miserable child, and in fact, throughout my life people have always said that I had a “sunny disposition,” but I don’t think I was ever truly “happy.”

As I passed through my turbulent teens, and into my twenties, I became more and more “unhappy,” and more dissatisfied with everything that was going on in my life. I could never hold down a job, although I was bright. I drank too much, and I flitted from girl to girl.

Although I had fleeting moments of happiness, such as getting a new job, finding a new girlfriend, getting my paycheck, buying new gadgets, cars, or going on holiday; these intense moments of happiness were followed by a steady decline into boredom and dissatisfaction. Nothing could make me happy I concluded, except perhaps an abundance of money.

Yes. That was what was required, and I set off in search of it. I found I could do contracting in the information technology field, and I “blagged” my way into a project management job which was paying about six times the hourly rate I was on previously. When my first week’s paycheck came in I couldn’t believe it! Wow! All this money for me! I was so happy. And at the weekend, I treated my girlfriend to a nice meal, bought her some nice presents, bought myself some nice presents, bought a bottle of champagne and celebrated.

This was more like it, and I was starting to feel much happier. My parents were happier with me as I wasn’t borrowing money from them anymore, my girlfriend was happy because now we could afford nice things, and I could buy her presents and take her out, and internally it felt like a great stone had been removed from my neck. I was free! I could now do anything I wanted. I had plenty of money.

This went on for about six months, but I was noticing that although I was earning five to six times as much as I had been previously, I was also spending five to six times as much and sometimes more! We moved into a big house by the sea, I bought my girlfriend a horse and a dog, we had a nice new 4x4 jeep, and we went skiing for christmas. This was the life. I was now much happier than I had been for years, and as I approached my thirtieth birthday, I felt pretty good about everything.

But one day, as I was walking down by the sea with the dog, I got a tiny piece of insight which told me, that as much I was earning, I was spending, and even if I earned more than I was earning now, I could see that I would probably spend it. I then worked out what I believed the maximum amount of money I could earn as an consultant would be, and concluded that I was probably nearly at that amount already. Then what? If I couldn’t earn anymore then what would happen to my happiness? I decided that something had to be done! One afternoon, as we were grooming our horse in a little field close to the sea, I turned to my girlfriend casually and said:

“Do you want to go travelling to australia?”

“Yeah, ok!” She replied excitedly.

In search of happiness?

And that was it. We sold all our possessions for a tenth of what they were worth, stored a few personal things at my parents house, and gave the rest away. I handed in my notice, emptied my bank accounts, begrudgingly gave some to my girlfriend, and five months later we were standing at the airport with our rucksacks on. As the plane climbed into the night sky, I thought to myself “Ha! We’re free! I’m so happy!”

The first month or two were fantastic. We were so happy in australia; It was new and exciting, money wasn’t a problem, and we bought surfboards, new clothes, new watches, a car, new jewellery and partied like it was going out of fashion! The beer flowed, and the money flowed, day in, day out.

But that wasn’t what I wanted to be doing, I thought to myself as I woke up in the hostel with yet another raging hangover. I wanted to drive around australia, and I would. “We have to leave straight after christmas,”

I told my girlfriend; and on boxing day, we got into the car, and started driving.

This was it. Freedom. Travelling the open road; stopping to look at the natural wonders, sleeping in a makeshift bed in the back of the car. This was what happiness was about I concluded, and I relished every moment of it. But not for long.

Why does the money always dry up?

In my state of happiness at being on the open road, I had forgotten to check how much money we were spending (as neither of us had jobs), and within six months, it was gone. My relationship with my girlfriend became more and more strained as I realised that without the money to keep us happy, there was no love between us, and we split up. How was I going to get money to live?

I was now desperately unhappy; alone in a country with no friends, save for party backpackers with whom I would share an occasional drunken night with.

But then something magical happened. I met a girl whose was working at the backpackers I was staying in. At first we felt nothing towards each other, but that soon changed as we decided to head off to sydney together. We stopped in a little village called byron bay, and it was there that we fell in love. And what a love it was. I say "was," because we too have split up, after six and a half years travelling the world together, working together, learning together, sharing successes and disappointments.

During the first few years everything was great. I had forgotten how desperately unhappy I had been with my previous girlfriends and previous jobs. I met really interesting people, and I learned a lot about myself.

Money wasn't important to me anymore, I decided (although we were still having to work just to scrape by). I felt like there was a huge change in me, and I liked it. Except it was only temporary.

We returned to australia with the idea of starting a massage business, but with only a few pounds left over from our travelling days, it was impossible to get going properly. My wife (for we had got married the previous year) got a job straight away, but I was obsessed with the idea of getting this business off the ground. So once again, I was unhappy. Unhappy at the life I found myself in. I didn't want to be poor!

"I am not good at being poor," I thought, so I too got a job, and although I was earning a decent salary, it wasn't enough to allow me to keep buying new things (which I loved to do). I couldn't buy presents for my wife, and I couldn't do the things I liked doing. This was no good.

Why wasn't I happy? I had a beautiful wife, a nice (rented) house in melbourne, australia, and I had a job of sorts, and a couple of friends; in fact, everything that anyone could wish for, but still it wasn't enough.

I had to go travelling again I decided. So off on the plane I jumped once more, for thailand and the uk, but it was different this time, without the person I loved by my side. I felt empty and even more unhappy.

I spent more and more time at the pub drinking, pretending to be the happy traveller that everyone envied. I had to get back to australia, to my wife, I thought, so on the plane I jumped, back to melbourne. I got another job, and I tried my hardest to be happy but inside there was just darkness. The months dragged on and I said:

"I'm off travelling again."

"What? Why?" my wife asked.

"I just need to get away," I replied.

And that night in bed she said to me:

"If you stay, we can work this out, I promise. But if you go this time, don't come back."

Oh my god, she was giving me an ultimatum, that wasn't good. But my mind was already made up. I had to go. And I did.

A new beginning?

Since that time I've been involved with a couple of other people, started writing this book in earnest, travelled to several different places, and worked in several different jobs – all in search of true happiness. But it is only in the last six months I have come to realise what happiness is (and what it isn't).

I thought happiness meant having a stable family life, with a career, and two holidays a year. I thought the

reason I was miserable was because I didn't have any money. It was so obvious to me! When I had plenty of money, I was happy. When I had none, I was miserable. So the only way to ensure I had this constant state of happiness was to ensure a constant flow of money. Hey, this is easy!

I knew what I needed to do. I needed to get a good job. Get a nice house. Get someone attractive and intelligent to live with, get a dog maybe... But a little voice in the back of my mind was saying "But you've had all this before, alan."

"Oh, no!" I thought.

The voice (which was my own) was right. Years before, I had all this. The well paid job, the attractive girlfriend, the dog, the house by the sea, and now several years later, I wanted it all back. How stupid had I been? Why did I hand in my notice, why did I go travelling, what was the point of all this. Oh, how stupid I was! I had been out of computers for over nine years so there was no chance of getting my old contracting jobs back, and that was all I knew. My life was finished, I would end up working cleaning toilets or something like that! I cursed myself for being so idiotic. "How could I think there would be more than I already had? Stupid. Stupid."

I couldn't believe what I had done. I had given up everything I held dear to me on a whim, and traded it for this. For nothing. Why hadn't I seen this coming? Why couldn't I go back to the way it was before? I didn't even bloody like this new me.

People I knew were starting to question me about what I would be doing with my life now I had come back from australia. "Oh, I'm writing a book" I would reply, hoping that got me off the hook, but my parents were even more insistent that I give them an answer.

"Now come on alan, you're 37 years old, don't you think it's time you gave up all this travelling nonsense and settle down?"

"No! I don't want to settle down," I shouted. "I don't."

"Then what do you want to do, son?"

"I don't know. I don't know."

And it was true, I didn't. Sure, I was writing this book, but that would be over in a couple of years, and then what would I do? Would I end up on the streets, addicted to drugs or alcohol? Would people look back on me and say "It's a shame what happened, he was a really bright boy with a bright future ahead of him, but he threw it all away, shame."

I thought and I thought, but I couldn't see a way out of the misery I had created for myself. I had really screwed up, and I knew it. I was going to be a forty something backpacker, going from place to place, trying to meet new people who were just embarking on their travels, and boring them with my stories. Where would I work? What if I got sick? Where would I live when my parents died? What would I *do*?

I got more and more depressed and spent more and more time trying to find a solution in a beer glass, but it wasn't helping, nothing was helping.

I was utterly dissatisfied with my life. And then it hit me. I was discontent with everything. I was discontent with people, with politicians, with careers, authority, litter, prejudice, poverty, greed, murder. I was discontent with being told to conform to someone else's idea of what happiness was. The reason I wasn't happy was because I wasn't conforming.

If only I had settled down to a job as soon as I left school, If only I had done better at school, and just been satisfied with my lot in life, this discontent would never have arisen. By now I could have had a nice career, company car, a wife and family. My parents would have been pleased for me. And they would love having grandchildren! On sundays, after lunch, we could all go for a walk with the kids and the dogs. And we would be having a very nice time thank you.

"If only you had conformed" say the powers that be, "you wouldn't be in this silly situation. You weren't supposed to tamper with the program. If only you'd gone along with it, you'd be perfectly happy right now. You've only got yourself to blame."

"But I am not unhappy!" I thought "I love life. I have always loved life. But boy am I angry. Boy am I discontent, and I'm going to do something about it."

Discontent

1. A longing for something better than the present situation

The more I thought about it, the more angry I became. How could I have been so stupid? How could I have thought that happiness was something I could get with money or by constantly travelling around the world?

As a child I was happy. As a child I loved everything. It was only when I became an adult that things started going wrong, when I was expected to behave in a certain way I became discontent with life. The more I started to see the truth of it, the less angry I became. There was no point in being angry all the time. All I would do as alienate more people from my life.

I could start a revolution and try to overthrow the government but what purpose would that serve except either ending in my death, or that of many others, and anyway, who was I? Certainly no revolutionary! No. I had to find a better way. I had to transcend the anger I was feeling and try to understand what it was that was making me angry.

The dictionary definition of discontent is “*a longing for something better than the present situation*,” but I couldn’t accept that I was longing for something better. I actually wanted to create something better. I wanted to create a better world, one where money was not god, where people did not conform, where happiness was not just an external illusion. A world where compassion and love replaced fear and violence. But how would I do it? This was surely going to be a mammoth task.

How could I get everyone in the entire world to change? I realised that once again I was being stupid! You can never force people to change. They have to want to change, and the only person you could change was you. So I did.

I let go of the anger I was feeling, as I realised it could do no other purpose but stop me from seeing the truth of the whole situation, and started to become aware of what it really meant to be discontent. Why was I discontented with the life I had, when on the surface it appeared that I had everything I needed to make me happy? The first thing I did was to accept that I was happy. I was happy to be alive. And that was a good starting point if I wanted to dig any deeper.

My mother was right; I was a happy child. And I was a happy adult. I was just so caught up in my own external needs of wanting to be happy, that I was blind to see the truth.

Being alive on this wonderful abundant planet, so full of beauty, was enough. Sure, we needed to eat and to have shelter, clothing and procreate to keep the species alive but they had nothing to do with happiness. Those were the basics we needed as a species to survive, bolt-on happiness providers like having a girlfriend, children, nice house, holidays, money, were all illusion – illusions created by conforming.

Happiness is contentment with who you are. Happiness is an absence of conflict in the mind and knowing no fear. Happiness is accepting that you are part of the universe, and it is part of you; and that you are not alone, although it sometimes feels like that. You are happy. You have always been happy, and that the desire for happiness is just desire. Nothing more. But don’t take my word for it.

Watch yourself next time you feel happy, watch the movement of your mind, notice how your body feels and your heart is beating.

Are you sure you are not confusing happiness with excitement (*the feeling of lively and cheerful joy, The state of being emotionally aroused and worked up*)? You can call it happiness, or anything else you want, but you will notice that these are only temporary feelings and then the discontentment returns.

I get a pay rise. Wow! I am excited. I am happy, but then it passes.

Wow! I have found the love of my life, I’m going to marry her, and I am excited and I am happy, but then it passes.

Wow! We have just bought a new house, and I am so happy, but then it passes.

Wow! We have just had a baby boy. We are so excited. It is the happiest day of our life. But then it passes.

With all things of the material – even having children – the state of happiness is only ever temporary. You may love your child, but are you as happy as the day you noticed you were pregnant or the day you had the baby (maybe not happy, given the amount of pain you probably suffered). But can you see what I am getting at?

Happiness, as we know it, is only a temporary emotional state, and when the feeling of elation or joy passes, discontentment fills the space; until the next happy moment, and then back to discontentment. You cannot force yourself to be happy every day, and trying to, as I did, by filling my days with so many

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

“temporary excitement moments” only made the discontentment worse when it came. From a great high, always comes a great low, as anyone who has ever taken drugs will tell you.

So learning to live in a state of happiness or joy is not about filling your life with things to take away the discontentment. It is allowing the discontent to rise in you until such time as you wake up! And wake up with a bang you will. Only then can you start to understand what true happiness is about. Let the discontentment begin!

[Back to Index](#)

Hate

1. *The emotion of hate; a feeling of dislike so strong that it demands action*
2. *Dislike intensely; feel antipathy or aversion towards*

*I hate him with his rich lifestyle
I hate her shoes
I hate you because you are fat
I hate you because you are french
I hate you because you are black or white
I hate you because you are a beggar
I hate you because you are playing music I don't like
I hate your hair
I hate her laugh
I hate the clothes he wears
I hate this tv program
I hate when you smile at me
I hate you because you are catholic
I just hate you*

Why do we hate? What is hate? Well, hate is just another word with four letters, made up of two consonants and two vowels, but think about this: When you were born, who did you hate? Stop. Think Carefully. I didn't hate anybody, did you? So let's ask an easy question of each other. What has changed since we were born?

Well, from my point of view, the only thing that has changed is that my mind has been filled up with knowledge, conditioning, experience and memory.

Everything you were when you were born you still are. The only thing that has changed is the content of your mind. So, perhaps we can agree that hate is all in the mind? It's not something real (although you may hate someone so much, you may kill him; that's pretty real!). But hate itself is nothing but an image, a story, a conversation. Hate is just a mass of connections in the brain, that's all it is. Unfortunately for us, once all the wiring is complete it is hard to track back and rewire it, but we can but try. So let us now begin our discussion in earnest.

What is it about the british or the americans that so many people "hate" at the moment? They may have never met anyone from either country but no, they "hate americans."

I have heard it so many times over the last few years that it is starting to annoy me, especially as I have a good friend who is american, and I certainly can't see why anyone would hate him. He is friendly, thoughtful, kind, does lots of voluntary work and plenty else. Why would you hate him?

"Because," begins the brain, "he is part of the imperialist capitalist consumer society that is taking over the world, they make me sick, damned americans with their big cars, loud talk, oh they're so arrogant, it's like they think they know everything, and they're always right...."

Ok that's a lot of hate! So I think it's time we pick up the phone and talk to someone who hates america and americans.

Me: Hello, my name's alan, I'm phoning to talk to you about america, and why you hate it so much.

Mr hate: Oh yes, I've been expecting your call. You english?

Me: Scottish actually, but I grew up in england.

Mr hate: You are just as bad as the americans.

Me: Oh, why?

Mr hate: You and your imperialist ways you took over the world and made people suffer for your greed.

Me: Actually, that's not entirely true. I had nothing to do with british imperialism, I am only 38, have no money to speak of, and care neither one way or the other for the country.

Mr hate: Yes, but you're still a british citizen. By being british you are responsible for all the deeds that your country has done in the world. That is why you must pay.

Me: That's a bit strong. I think what britain did in the past was terrible, but that is past. Now is now and I have nothing to do with the past.

Mr hate: But don't you see. No one has paid the price for all the killing, torture and rape that your people did to my country.

Me: But it is past. Sorry can I ask you how old you are?

Mr hate: I'm twenty four.

Me: Twenty four! But you're even younger than me. The british were long gone by the time you were born. You live now, not in the past.

Mr hate: But the suffering continues, because of british imperialism.

Me: So you keep saying. But listen. How do you know that your country is suffering because of the british?

Mr hate: It is obvious.

Me: Well not to me. Who told you about british imperialism and all the atrocities that were carried out by them?

Mr hate: It is written in many books, we have learned in school and our parents still remember what the british did.

Me: So what you're saying is, you have had memories planted in your mind by people who did suffer and want revenge?

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

- Mr hate:** No, that's not what I'm saying. I am saying that the british must pay for what they did to us.
- Me:** So what you're saying is, the collective memory of the people, written into books and told in class has been imprinted on your memory by people who want you to take revenge on the british?
- Mr hate:** My father was murdered by the british, isn't that enough?
- Me:** For you to hate? Yes, probably. But do you hate all british, or just the soldier who killed your father?
- Mr hate:** All british, they represent everything that is bad in the world.
- Me:** But do you hate me?
- Mr hate:** Why do you ask?
- Me:** Well, it seems as if we're having a nice conversation here, and you sound like a nice man, I was just wondering if you hated me?
- Mr hate:** I am sure you are a nice man too, and no, I don't personally hate you, I just hate the british.
- Me:** So this british thing is a concept? You don't hate me personally just the idea of britain?
- Mr hate:** Yes. That's true. I have nothing against you. But my father was killed by the british and they must pay for that.
- Me:** But if you kill someone, their family will suffer.
- Mr hate:** Why not? My family has suffered.
- Me:** But that's just revenge, not hate. Look let's get back to what you were saying about the idea of the british. What is it precisely that you hate?
- Mr hate:** Everything. Their arrogant attitudes, their rich lifestyles, their army, their politicians.
- Me:** Have you ever been to britain.
- Mr hate:** No. I would never go.
- Me:** Ok, what about if I swapped lives with you, and I came to live in your country for a while. Do you think I would hate britain then?
- Mr hate:** No. Because you are british.
- Me:** So actually it is not the people at all. It is the nation, the country, the flag, and what it represents that you hate.
- Mr hate:** Exactly.
- Me:** But the flag is nothing more than a piece of cloth. The country name is just a label. Underneath we are all just people together. The concept that the flag represents has nothing to do with real people; it exists whether we are here or not, because the powerful keep it going. So is it not power that you hate?
- Mr hate:** Yes I hate everything about power, the powerful, they killed my father.
- Me:** But aren't there powerful people in your country as well, keeping the flag flying and brainwashing everyone to believing in the "nation."
- Mr hate:** I guess there are, it's true, I hadn't thought about it like that before.
- Me:** So do you now still hate all british.
- Mr hate:** I just miss my father.
- Me:** I know you do. Take care.
- Mr hate:** You too, goodbye.

So, before you go around hating people just because their passport says they come from a specific country try to have a conversation like that with yourself. Write it down and see why you hate. Remember we are here to unravel hate in your mind.

I did not choose to be british. I was born and assigned a label, thanks to my parents being labelled some years before. If I had my way, there would be no separate nations, as it only causes fear and division, and if I could give up my passport today I would. But until all countries start accepting we are all citizens of the world and we don't need "official papers" to travel on our own planet, I will have to hang onto mine for now. But I will be trying to find a way to give up citizenship of any country and still be able to travel. I will let you know how I get on. But let us get back to our discussion.

We can now see that hate does not exist in one form. It is the accumulation of different processes, stories,

teaching, propaganda, experience, and memory (whether yours or not), and it is only when all of these different items come together, in just the right amounts, that hate is formed. But we must become aware of it straight away before it takes root.

Some people hate others because they are rich, but let's examine for a moment why you would hate someone just because they had more money than you. First, jealousy has come into play. You are jealous because you are poor. Then greed comes into play, because you want more than you already have, and finally comparing, where you compare your lifestyles, and see that his is better than yours. So rather than (a) just letting it go and being happy with your life or (b) going out to work to earn more money than him, you "hate him" because it's easy, and it makes you feel good.

Think about it, it's really quite simple. We don't hate anyone, as hate in itself does not exist. It is a cauldron mixed with many ingredients heated to just the right temperature; but if you look closely, you will find some key ingredients every time.

Imagine you split up from your husband or wife, why do so many people hate their "ex's"? What is it about finishing a relationship with somebody you loved, that you went on so many holidays, and shared so many good times with, that can end up with you saying "I hate him." Well let's explore it.

If he finished with you, there is the obvious sadness that it is finished, but the fact you were left leads to resentment and hurt, and if he has someone else, then obviously jealousy comes into it. How could somebody you loved do this to you? You loved them and this is how they repaid you! I hate him, for leaving me, I hate him for running off with another woman. But can you see that hate is just a word? It is not real, it is the feelings behind the word that are real, and like my friend who hated Britain, once we had explored it enough we found out the root cause of it (the loss of his father) – that actually, he hated no one.

We have to do the same in every situation that we find ourselves saying "I hate," because once it takes hold, it's hard to uproot; remember that. So before it does, look deeply into the situation causing the word "hate" to be emitted, and write a conversation with the hated object. You might find out more about yourself than you know.

You don't hate anyone, I am sure of it. Just as I don't hate anyone. But I did. At least I thought I did until I found out I was hurt, or jealous, and then I dealt with those feelings by going through the process of becoming aware of my emotions and thoughts. I urge you to do the same before anyone else gets hurt.

We are all human, we are all members of the same species. A monkey doesn't hate a monkey. A lion doesn't hate a lion. It is thought that creates hate, and when we stop thinking so much, and take the time to do some exploring, then perhaps we will stop hating. Try it.

Remember, hate is just a word made up from two vowels and two consonants, and although the feelings behind are more complex, even a simple word can cause a lot of pain to others – physical and emotional. Empty your mind of the word. Allow yourself to be the love that you are.

[Back to Index](#)

Health

1. *The general condition of body and mind*

I think it's fair to say, that as a species, we generally tend to be living a lot longer than we used to. Gone are the days when many women died in childbirth, or infants died in the first year of life. All over the world men and women are living into their eightieth year and beyond. We can attribute this to many causes including improved sanitation and living conditions, availability of fresh fruit and vegetables but most of all, we have the development of modern medicine to thank.

Sure we still get sick, but these days (especially in the developed world), we just go down to the doctor or go into hospital, and we are either given wonder drugs, or operated on. We are saving more people than ever before. People with weak immune systems, bad genes, unhealthy lifestyles or just those who engage in dangerous activities, are taken into hospital and saved! It's a miracle!

People can go on eating what they want, driving too fast, smoking, taking drugs, and drinking too much and there is always somebody there to drive you in an ambulance to the hospital. No longer do we just leave people to die, we can do something to help them, and for that we must thank the doctors and nurses all over the world. We even have veterinary hospitals to save our beloved pets from death and suffering. Everyone can be saved!

Well, not everyone, but we have a damn good go at it, and although the doctors tell us about curbing our unhealthy activities, we can just smile and carry on what we're doing knowing full well that if we get sick again, they will have to treat us. Hey, you may drink two litres of whisky every day, but if it gets really bad, they will always transplant a new liver into you courtesy of some dead guy. We also engage in potentially lethal sports knowing that help is just a mobile call away.

Life sure is different to even a hundred years ago. We don't have to worry about the risks of what we are doing at all. We can be absolved of all personal responsibility, and place it firmly in the hands of people who studied for years, just so they could help us.

We get involved in street fights and brawls, we even get shot sometimes; and although the doctors can't guarantee they can save us, the chances of living are much higher than if we were just left on the side of the road. The healthcare system is truly the compassionate side of the human race! Armies go to war knowing full well that there will be a team of doctors ready to help the soldiers fight another day, so let's face it, what would we do without them? Well for one thing, the population would probably get smaller, and perhaps, even perhaps, people might take a little more personal responsibility for themselves and their actions.

Population

1. *A group of organisms of the same species inhabiting a given area*
2. *The people who inhabit a territory or state*

I was astounded to read recently that the population of the world only forty years ago, was about half what it is now. Only three billion versus today's estimate of approximately six billion. That's right, six billion of us and growing! It's a frightening number of people, and still, people exercise their biological right to have more, and more children; driven in the knowledge that with modern medicine, they all have a good chance of surviving.

Some scientists have put the number of people that the earth can sustain at a good standard of living at about five hundred million, that's one-twelfth of the population we have now. Now, I don't know whether to believe these figures, but that's not what concerns us here, what I want to know is how the population keeps getting bigger beyond that which nature itself can sustain.

There is one reason. We keep saving people! I know that sounds harsh but it's true.

Gone are the days when nature would send along a good plague and wipe out a number of people; or a harvest would fail and a whole country would go hungry (as happened in Ireland). Now we have inoculations against all the nasty viruses that used to wipe out humans, and no longer will people starve to death, as we have modern agriculture and distribution methods.

No one must suffer, we must save everyone!

You may think I have lost my compassion for all beings, but isn't that precisely what is happening in countries like africa? For many reasons, including over-population, modern economics, corrupt inefficient governments, war, and the weather; the africans in some countries are finding fast that they do not have enough to eat. But instead of letting nature take its course, we intervene and we ship millions of tons of food to them every year.

Now, it is not that I don't have compassion for the africans, they have endured much suffering over the last several hundred years, especially at the hands of the rich, powerful westerners who came to enslave them and rob their country of all its natural resources. But as a people, they have managed to live happily with nature for many thousands of years without international aid. So we know something happened to change the delicate balance between Man and nature.

Greed, the building of western style cities, and the adoption of a consumer lifestyle (added together with many years of civil wars) have all contributed to the suffering they are enduring now. But what I want to understand is what would happen if the international aid and the medicine was not forthcoming?

Thanks to the wonders of modern media, we would see people starving and thirsty and ultimately dying. The big charities around the world like to make a play of this and regularly advertise for more and more donations to "help the children" etc. But perhaps once again we are doing what we do best, interfering in nature.

I can hear most of you shouting at me now, up in arms that I would suggest such a thing, but if we are to understand the true nature of what is happening in the world, we must put our conditioned thinking aside, at least for the moment.

Over the past few years in the uk, we have seen diseases like foot and mouth (*acute contagious disease of cloven-footed animals marked by ulcers in the mouth and around the hoofs*), which isn't in itself fatal to the animals, resulting in thousands of cows being killed and their carcasses thrown on large fires and burned. A simple inoculation would have cured them, but for economic reasons, unsurprisingly wasn't offered! The emergence of bird flu (*a highly contagious type of influenza found in birds*) has also meant that millions of chickens have been killed to stop it from spreading but you wouldn't see that happening in the human world. No sir. We must save everyone from disease and death, whatever the cost (to the planet).

You see, there is a grave problem in africa (the continent) and other parts of the world with starvation and disease, but because we are talking about humans, as opposed to our less intelligent brothers, the animals, we can't just round them all up and say: "Sorry about this, but you are all diseased, and for the benefit of everyone else, we are going to have to kill you and stack your bodies high on funeral pyres." That would be madness! We would be murderers, and would be considered inhuman by all, but it's ok to kill animals and birds that are diseased, because, they're animals!

The human is the most important species on the planet. The most intelligent being. And so we do everything in our power to save them. I fail to see the difference between murdering animals and murdering humans, but maybe I'm just stupid.

What I want to convey to you is, that although I do not believe that nature (*a causal agent creating and controlling things in the universe*) has a grand plan for us all, it seems to have kept the world in balance for many billions of years. There has of course been much disease and death, but if you believe we are all a part of the universe, then the idea of death will not trouble you so much. Birth, death, rebirth is just a part of the movement of nature. There is no beginning and no end.

But humans don't see it like that, do we? We see our birth as the time we leave our mothers womb and death as when we are laid into the ground, and in between, we do everything to "survive," but what are we trying to survive? If we are part of the eternal (*continuing forever or indefinitely*), which is the universe, then what do we have to worry about! But we digress.

I want you to try to look at this differently then; I want you to see the problems of disease, hunger and suffering from a different perspective. When we consider the situation in africa from a human point of view, we see it as something terrible, something that must be altered or fixed (presumably as we know it was our doing in the first place), but I don't see it as terrible, I just see it as it is.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

They fight with each other for control and domination. The weather has not been kind. The mass agricultural system built around the movement of people to cities has contributed to the crops failure, and lack of water. They continue to have children. They continue to aspire to a western lifestyle. The politicians are incompetent. Shall I continue?

Nature has provided everything. All that is required is already here. Do you understand? There was enough water, and there was enough food. But something happened. Man has tried to control nature, and as with everything Man tries to do, has caused an imbalance. Suffering, disease, and starvation are the result of that imbalance (this doesn't just apply to africa).

I keep thinking back to when the lands of africa were able to sustain the people, and why they are not able to now. The imbalance is not their fault, nor anyone persons fault, but imbalance it is, make no mistake about it. The lack of food, or rain, could be the result of another country's greed and desire in another part of the world. It could be the agricultural and social policies of a country ten thousand miles away which has caused the imbalance. But the common denominator is our good friend Man, mr homo sapiens – which shouldn't surprise you really!

We blame global warming, or some other idea for the disasters we see around the world, but global warming, or even over-population isn't the problem; it's Man's thinking that has caused the misery we can see now. His desire to be rich and powerful, and have more food than he needs; to expand his empires, to acquire more land and more possessions.

The world is truly imbalanced. But unfortunately, the do-gooders of the world think the solution to the perceived inequality between the "have's" and the "have not's" is that everyone should have more! Hopefully they will start to see that ensuring everyone has more is usually going to mean that someone else will have less, and that won't be the humans if they can help it. It will be the animals, and the birds, and the grass, and the trees. In fact, the whole planet is going to suffer, just so "one child never has to know the terrible pain of suffering." But it's not going to work. Man is no match for nature.

Let nature be

So, cruel as it may sound, what would happen if we didn't provide emergency food aid and medicines to africa? What if we just let nature take its course? What would happen? Would, as we predict, have the deaths of millions of peoples on our hands? That, I'm afraid, is a distinct possibility.

Would it bring nature back into balance as we hoped it would when we killed millions of chickens to prevent the spread of avian flu? Would the cities crumble, and the desire for a powerful life full of riches dissolve? What do you think? You see, Man is good at controlling other men and helpless animals, but he has no control over the big stuff. The sun, the rain, the wind. All that is nature's domain.

We build our beautiful cities with intelligent cultured people. We work hard and we build our beautiful homes and give birth to wonderful children. We go to concerts and we create great learning institutions for the next generation. We create works of art and we go into politics. We print money and we keep it in the bank. Then one day a great earthquake comes and flattens the city, the buildings, the houses, the parks, the culture, the learning, all gone, under the tons of rubble that are left. People are left for dead wherever we look. Nature has spoken.

All over the world, nature is communicating with us, telling us of the imbalance we are creating. From the sea great tidal waves come and great storms rage the ocean, and from the sky rains create great floods or lack of rain cause great drought. There is no thought behind this though. Nature is.

But the thing nature doesn't count on, is Man's ability to think creatively! Nature doesn't know that Man has developed modern medicine, nor does it know that Man won't just leave the sick and wounded to die, or that Man will rebuild his city exactly where the last earthquake hit! Nature doesn't know that man cannot just leave another man to starve. And that's where the problem lies. We are just too damn nice to each other!

We have compassion for others that goes way beyond the call of duty. That's why, when we see our brother suffering in africa, or wherever it may be, we send aid. We try to help him so he will not suffer. We do not want to see the faces of dying children, as they could be our children, so we send money, we do anything to help.

We go to africa, we develop new water systems to irrigate the land, we bring medicine, engineers,

farmers, machinery. We will help them, we say. We will save our brothers in africa. But still war ravages on, Men still desire power and riches, politicians are still incompetent, and the cities are expanded even more. Do you follow all this?

The land of africa was in balance. Man was in balance with the land.

Then thought arose. And then man was out of balance.

So what did Man do? He thought, and he thought, and he thought how to bring balance back to the land.

But it was too late. He didn't know what balance was.

Try as we might to overcome nature with our medicine, and our operating theatres, and our worldwide food aid programs, we can no more stop the movement of nature, as we may try to stop the snows melting in the spring. And talking of spring, I sit here writing in the cellar of a house in northern scandinavia in the middle of january watching the temperature rise and the snows melt when once at this time of year it was freezing with several metres of snow. I can see the grass starting to appear where last week it was covered. Some people call this global warming. I just call it imbalance.

Balance

1. *A state of equilibrium*

So what is this state of equilibrium we are talking about here? Equilibrium (*a stable situation in which forces cancel one another; or a chemical reaction and its reverse proceed at equal rates or Equality of distribution*) is seen as something that man has control over, or at least has the ability to control, but to me it is something unseen, unobservable to the naked eye; something that goes on in the background, and foreground, forever monitoring and remedying where necessary.

It could be said that the universe, although constantly changing, is the ultimate balance machine. It is the scales of justice that order our world. And it is from this perspective that I would like to continue our discussion.

When the universe was born (or reborn), it has been said that out of chaos, came order, and with each passing year, so the earth became more ordered and more balanced. Just the right amount of worms for the birds to eat, just the right amount of mice for the owls to eat, just the right amount of trees for the birds to nest in, just the right amount of nuts and berries for the monkeys, and whenever one species became too populous or too dominant, there were natural controls in place to redress the balance.

Although we think we understand how the balancing machine works, we have never been able to say why there would be such a thing in the first place. Why did the universe bother? What was the point of all this? Was there a grand plan? Why is ours the only planet capable of sustaining life? Is there a creator? Who is he? Questions have been posed for many thousands of years (probably since we first started to think) but ultimately it doesn't matter why. It just is.

So let's try to accept that for a moment while we consider the building blocks of the universe. Whether we call them quarks (*(physics) hypothetical truly fundamental particle in mesons and baryons; there are supposed to be six flavours of quarks (and their antiquarks), which come in pairs; each has an electric charge of +2/3 or -1/3*) or atoms or some other name, it must all have come from somewhere, so there must have been a thought of how to order it, and how to maintain balance. But you see, where we all get caught up, is in thinking, and because thought is so limited, we imagine that there must have been thought behind its design! That's just the way our minds think. Sorry if I'm confusing you, sometimes I confuse myself.

Underneath our nice houses, cars, ambitions, clothes and desires we are primarily all made up of carbon (*atomic number 6*) atoms (or perhaps something smaller and more fundamental) all charging around at huge speeds. Even women's most cherished accessory, the diamond, comes from carbon. It is a non metallic element which occurs in all organic compounds. The coal we burn to create electricity and heat comes from carbonised vegetable matter. Even the earth's crust is primarily made up of carbon.

We think everything in the world is different, but underneath the physical disguise, the building blocks are

the same.

Over the centuries, Man has discovered many of the elements that make up the universe, and as such a periodic table was created which details whether they are metallic, gases, or non metallic, and gives all known elements an atomic weight and number.

These are the building blocks of life.

Water, our most precious resource is just two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom. There is no such thing as “water,” it is merely the bonding of two elements. And while we are on the subject of water, it is interesting to note that whilst approx seventy percent of the earth’s crust is covered in water, Man is also made of approx seventy percent water. Coincidence? Let’s not speculate.

So back to our building blocks. If our universe was created in a big bang, supposedly all the elements we find in life now would also be present, as they have not been created by man, but merely discovered through scientific enquiry. So how many of these building blocks were there? Were there a specific number for organic life forms, a specific number for water, gas or ice, a certain number for metallic compounds etc. or was it all just complete random?

Let us have an imaginary discussion for a moment. If only 100 of these building blocks were available at the start of our planet in order to retain balance throughout the rest of our universe, how do you think they were allocated? Would 70 be allocated for water, 20 for the earth’s crust and ten for organic life forms, or was it all so random that it was just luck that the earth was round (almost), that there was land to live on, and salt water to evaporate, fall as rain, form rivers and allow land based life to exist? The unlikeliness of the whole thing, is what leads us to believe that there must have been intelligent life that created it. And there was.

Order in the universe is held together by gravity (*(physics) the force of attraction between all masses in the universe; especially the attraction of the earth’s mass for bodies near its surface*). In all its seemingly random glory when we look at the stars at night from the earth, there is order. Universal order. Not created by thought.

It makes no sense to me that all this could exist if there was not also balance within the order. How could the universe exist at all if there were too many stars (*(astronomy) a celestial body of hot gases that radiates energy derived from thermonuclear reactions in the interior*), or too many planets within a given region? So all of this balance must be in some way fundamental, not only to the existence of the universe, but the existence of all living creatures on this earth, and finally to the star of the whole show. Me! The human being. King of the universe!

King of the universe?

Somehow all this postulating about us being so great and knowledgeable doesn’t quite ring true when we look at the mass of forces governing the universe. What do you think?

When we start to break down our massive egos to an element called carbon, we suddenly start to look a little foolish. And foolish we have been.

Through the development of the human brain, the development of “I” (I need, I want, I deserve, I think, I hate, I love), we have missed out on learning something interesting about ourselves as a species. One which all those who think we are (a) not part of the animal world, (b) come from an alien race of super beings, or (c) were created by the hand of god, seem to constantly deny.

Carbon is everywhere. It is in the earth, in the animals and in us. If we are based on the element carbon, we are as much a part of everything as it is of us. It is this constant denial that is causing us so many problems. Like the android (*an automaton that resembles a human being*) who so desperately wants to become a man, so we desperately want to be something more than human. We want to be special. But we already are, we have just forgotten.

Atomic number six come in. Your time is up.

Just as the sun will eventually use up all of its energy and start to expand, rapidly engulfing our planet,

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

before finally exploding and creating the beginnings of a new star, so our time on earth will come to an end also. But this is not about death or rebirth, just a change in state. You see, we are not really human; we are carbon atoms lent by the universe for a temporary period of time.

Before you think my mind has gone, this is not philosophy my friends, this is chemistry! Universal chemistry.

You see, in universal time, the human being is not important; in fact, all he seems to be is a nuisance! Nature is always having to clean up after him, always trying to bring everything back into balance wherever Man treads, or tries to help out. But we don't know anything about ourselves, let alone balancing universes, so why do we keep interfering? I'll just tell you one more time so I don't bore you. Because we think too much!

We desperately cling to life, hoping we never die, hoping pets don't die, or the people in africa or asia don't die. We develop medicines, and send food parcels; pick up the pieces of road crash victims and put them back together again. We want to save the beautiful children who look at us in the tv ads with longing eyes. "Please help them" the ads say. But nature is at work. Sure, Man may have caused the suffering in the first place, because that is his life's work, but nature will do its best to restore balance.

What is Man thinking? You may well ask. But we need to let go. We need to accept that people die, and let that be the end of it. It is not about a lack of compassion, it is about letting nature do its work. We cannot restore balance, no matter how hard we try. It isn't the work of a simple carbon life form. All we are doing is creating a population so large that in the end, nature will have to resort to some extreme measures to bring the planet, and therefore the universe back into balance.

We also spend our time diverting rivers and creating dams, saving species from extinction (probably because Man drove them to extinction), moving species across continents so the new inhabitants would feel at home (as the british did when they colonised australia), killing natural predators of animals to preserve our livestock and income, cutting down forests, creating wastelands, and constantly urbanising the natural environment.

But just as some humans attempt to destroy everything, their opposites try to save everything. But in the end nature will have the last laugh, and it will be at our expense. You see, it's really very simple. In order to understand nature, we don't have to go to university to study it, and observe it. We are it. It's time we started to observe ourselves and let nature just do its thing. But that doesn't mean we don't have to stop taking responsibility for our actions that throw it out of balance.

The universe is balance
Fear and violence is imbalance
Nature is balance
Thought and desire is imbalance
Birth and death is balance
Greed and hunger is imbalance
Get the picture?

[Back to Index](#)

History

1. *The aggregate of past events*
2. *The continuum of events occurring in succession leading from the past to the present and even into the future*
3. *A record or narrative description of past events*
4. *All that is remembered of the past as preserved in writing; a body of knowledge*

I spent most of yesterday afternoon reading through a detailed history of the world, whilst at the library. The thing that most surprised me was how current it all was! Here I was reading about events from 55 bc, 400 ad, 1100 ad, 1556, 1722, 1852, 1952, 1987, and 2000, and it could have been the news I read yesterday! Murder, greed, power, deception, sexual scandal, control. They were all there, just as they are today, which got me thinking! “What’s the point in recording all these events? Is it so we can progress as a species, or is just voyeurism into the past?”

I want to discuss this with you today, because I believe we spend way too much time looking backwards (and forwards), when we should be concentrating on the present moment. Sure, it’s nice to look back at pictures, and see who invented stuff, and who won this battle, and who was burned at the stake for being a witch, but that’s just entertainment. Some of you reading this right now may be vocally disagreeing, but that’s ok with me. That’s what makes these dialogues more interesting!

When you look at the past, what do you see? Joy or despair? If you read history books the past always seems like a brutal place to be when we compare it to our lives today. People were being murdered all the time, disease was rife, life expectancy was short, food was scarce, the rulers were corrupt, powerful individuals were getting richer whilst the poor were getting poorer. Actually what I could be talking about, is any number of countries RIGHT NOW.

On the african continent, there are many countries with murderous regimes actively killing people right at this very moment; actively diverting funds to their own personal swiss bank accounts. It’s incredible to believe, isn’t it? What we thought was all in the past, confined to history books, is alive and well, operating right under our noses.

When we (westerners) look at history books, we may see that people are no longer being hung, drawn, and quartered in our country, and that we have a great health service, and that there are equal opportunities for most of us; where the weak are looked after, and the strong are regulated, so they do not overcome the weak. For us, history shows improvement.

As a british citizen, when I look back at history, I see people a lot worse off than me, struggling every day. Ok, so we might have had a lot of victories in battle, but no one seemed to be very joyful! So if I compare my life now, with its comfortable house, car, laptop, plentiful food etc. I’m rather glad I don’t live in the 1500’s or before.

Our fellow humans in parts of africa, asia, and the middle east don’t have the pleasure of looking back into history and being glad they live now. For some of them they may prefer to have lived in a different time. For most of them, living now is a living nightmare.

Fuelled by greed, power, the need for absolute and total control sprinkled with a dash of idealism, the rulers of these countries are making life hell for everyone who is not part of their select group. I will not go into details of each country individually here but they know who they are.

So as we can see, when we look back at history, we expect to see change for the better. It would be a fairly depressing school lesson if we all had to open our books at page 223 covering the oppression of the people in 1100 ad, where dissent was met with torture and death; only to point out that it was still going on in 2007! Well that’s what’s happening right now in some parts of the world.

**

We all complain about our lot in the west; that we don’t have enough money for a new car, that we have to work too hard, that we can only afford a two week holiday abroad with the family next year etc. But we do not realise how lucky we are.

I say lucky, because it is just luck that we in the west happen to be alive during a period which seems peaceful and calm in our countries, where capitalism and consumerism seem to be vying for the attention of the people.

Absolute state control of the people has reduced to a low level and the real people in power are the corporations, who (fortunately) don’t want to convert you to their religion, they just want to sell you stuff. So power has moved away from the gun to the dollar, which is equally as powerful, but comes with less obvious bloodshed.

In the west, we all seem to have quite a lot now; and thanks to mass production in asia, we can all afford electronic goods and fashion clothing. We all have housing, we all can afford some kind of car, we can all go

on a holiday. These days there is something for everyone. If you have a lot of money you can have an expensive car or go on an expensive holiday, and if you have a little money you can have a cheap car and go on a cheap holiday.

Gone are the days in the industrial western countries where only the rich could have a car or go on holiday. Capitalism has made the battlefield, and companies fight it out to the death using advertising, marketing and product innovation instead of weapons!

We have a democratic government, and no matter what you think of them, they make sure that people have jobs; and if they don't have jobs, support them financially until they do get one; and if you don't like this government you can just vote them out next time round.

You try doing that if you are a citizen in a country ruled by a dictator or junta (*a group of military officers who rule a country after seizing power*). They generally stay in power for as long as they can get away with it as they tend to be the sorts of people who like the power and the money.

In the west, we now have freedom of speech, whereby you can say anything you like against the government; try that in a dictator run country. Well, you can say what you like, but you are liable to be brutally tortured and then murdered!

So if the history books were to reflect back on this period in the west, they would have to say that it is a period of stability, prosperity and general happiness! There would be no pictures of slaves being dragged, shackled to their next "employer," no pictures of dissenters being hung, drawn, and quartered, and no pictures of starving children. There are of course people with individual problems in every country, but nothing worth reporting in the history books as a general state of affairs.

But like all that is past, history sits just behind us ready to become part of the present. Why? Because history is a record of actions: human actions and actions created by natural events.

As I look back through a chronicle of our history in Britain, I can see that although things have changed, like free schooling for all, a more comfortable lifestyle, and we live longer, the fundamental core of ourselves has not. What do I mean by that? Think about it for a moment.

If we trace our ancestors through history we can see certain traits which have been carried on through us. Certainly there are positive traits like inventiveness and resourcefulness, but others such as greed, violence, state sponsored murder, ego, vanity, ambition, power seeking, warmongering, sexual depravity, idealism, extremism, religious fanaticism, amongst many others have shown through in page after page of the history books, and appear right up until the present day.

So although we may have satellite television, jet aeroplanes, and fast food, are we really any different from the characters from the history books?

What have we learnt from history?

The one thing we must understand when people say "learn from history," is they are talking about avoiding repeating the same mistakes over and over. That is only possible if (a) they want to learn from their mistakes and (b) view them as mistakes in the first place! Slavery is a good indicator of this.

In Britain, there were slaves before the Roman times, and slaves were considered essential to the economy of the country. It wasn't until 1807 that slavery was eventually abolished thanks to the tireless work of several men, otherwise it would probably still be in existence today. Oh sorry, I forgot. It still does. Britain may not use slaves anymore but other countries still do, and you can see why they still think it's still a good idea – they get free labour! Unfortunately, people have to suffer, but there's always more of them aren't there?

There are a thousand stories from the history books we could use as examples here, but I think it would be more valuable if you found yourself a decent book on world history and the history of your own country and looked through it. I am sure you will find the same types of events coming up again and again.

So is that it? Are we destined to never truly move forward as a planet together? Will the same history continue to be written? Remember, we are a human race, we all live on this planet, there is no point writing history books to say, look what we've achieved, look what we've changed, look how we have changed, if it does not apply to the whole world.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

You may argue that that is impossible to achieve and countries and people progress at their own rate. Where some countries in africa are now, we in britain may have been 300 years ago.

But I do not believe we can just stand back and let the history books continue to be written. We cannot allow events of great sadness to transpire on our planet, and say: “Oh, well, in a couple of hundred years we will learn from our mistakes!” All this looking back into history to predict the future does not change the fact that people and animals are suffering RIGHT NOW because of terrible actions carried out by humans. Humans who do not care for each other, and who do not care for the planet they are living on.

Whether they are warmongers, politicians, churchmen or businessmen it doesn’t matter. These are the same people who have been causing us to suffer since the history books began. The names and the faces may have changed, but the core of these humans remains the same. Until they become aware of themselves in action we are destined for a miserable future on this planet. Until they transform greed, anger, hate, ego, power, and extremism into love, we will continue to have wars and suffering. Until we all transform consumerism into abstinence we will continue to destroy the planet and use up all of our resources.

Ultimately, all the historians have done is to illuminate the fact that in all the years we have been developing on this planet, the same basic drives have existed throughout.

Does this mean that Man is terminally flawed? Not at all. But until the human race become aware of themselves in the present and transform themselves, not over time, but instantaneously, history will continue to repeat itself. Because all history is us. Yesterday.

[Back to Index](#)

Home

1. *Where you live at a particular time*
2. *Housing that someone is living in*
3. *An environment offering affection and security*
4. *A social unit living together*

So, you've finally done it. You either got a mortgage from the bank, or you are renting, but nonetheless, this building with four walls you are about to move into, is yours! No more parents telling you what to do, nobody to share with, you (and your partner perhaps) are finally free. You can choose your own furniture and décor, you can play music at a level you want to listen to, eat what you want. This is your home, and as long as you keep paying your bills, no one is going to take it away from you. It's what you have always dreamed of. Now you have it. Congratulations!

Moving in day comes, and you have finally got your hands on the keys. You walk through the door and look around you. Home. This is where you will spend all your free time.

You spend the next few months buying new things, equipping the kitchen, getting the bedroom "just right," pictures are hung, photographs are displayed, and the wide screen tv is placed in the corner of the room, ready to receive the latest news, movies, cartoons, and soaps from the satellite dish on your roof.

Soon, everything is finished, and you have got the house just as you want it. Now you can get on with the business of enjoying it (just remember to keep up the repayments or you're out on your ear). But now it's ready, what do you do in it? Well, you cook, clean, watch tv, water the plants, sleep – you may even make love to your partner! But what else is there? To understand this we have to investigate more deeply.

We have said that the four walls, in which you are now "contained," is your home; that this is your secure place, where you come back to every night after a hard day at work. When you get home you do some chores and you probably "chill out" for a couple of hours before going back to work the next day. On your day off, you may, or may not, spend time at the home. You may invite friends over, or do some home improvements to keep yourself busy, then open a beer and turn on the tv. But what else is there?

You work hard to pay the bills, and over time you accumulate more and more possessions. Thanks to a surprise promotion, you find yourself with more cash and decide it's time for an upgrade.

You look around and find a bigger apartment or house within your budget and soon you are moving again. You get the keys, you walk through the door and look around your new home. This is where you will spend all your free time. You spend the next few months buying new things, equipping the kitchen, getting the bedroom "just right;" pictures are hung, photographs are displayed, and the wide screen television is placed in the corner of the room, ready to receive the latest news, movies, cartoons, and soaps from the satellite dish on your roof. Soon, everything is finished, and you have got the house just as you want it. Now you can get on with the business of enjoying it (just remember to keep up the repayments or you're out on your ear). Sorry, does anyone notice I am repeating myself?

Several years later you find you are expecting a child. What a wonderful moment. What great excitement. You can't wait to decorate and furnish the child's room and buy toys for them, but in the back of your mind you are thinking: "I wonder if this house is big enough?" And you set about looking for a bigger house, in a better area, where your child can grow up safely. You look around, find something you like and eventually get the keys...You get the idea.

When is enough, enough?

Many years later you now have the exact house you want in the perfect area. You have accumulated a mountain of stuff, and have had to invest in some serious security to protect it. New locks are fitted and an alarm is installed. You must protect the stuff at all costs. You have worked so hard for it, you must protect it, these are dangerous times, you know!

As time goes on, you notice that not only have the children grown up, but the four walls you call home, have turned into a storage depot! So you set about getting rid of things you no longer need, then decide it's time for a redecoration, and actually the sofa's getting old, and so are the carpets, so maybe you should change them too; or maybe it would be better to find a new house.

But this time, you downsize. You don't need the extra rooms, so you find a nice house in need of a bit of renovation and you (or the bank) buy it. You spend a small fortune ripping out the walls, tearing the kitchen down and set about replacing everything in the house with more modern appliances etc. "This will do us," you say to your partner. "We don't have to move again now." Or do you?

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

The thing with the human consumer is that he is *never* satisfied. He is continually moving. Moving in a direction he calls “up,” whatever that means. He has his status to think about, and the house is the ultimate status symbol.

Over the years, the human consumer attempts to fill his house with the best things he can afford (or can get credit for), and he hoards, and he hoards, afraid to lose his prized possessions lest he cannot get them again. But as people get older and pass into retirement these status symbols lose their charm and the human starts to become more concerned with the more down to earth business of just trying to survive! The four walls that meant everything to him are now not so important.

Sadly several years later, one partner dies, followed the next year by the other partner, and all that remains is a dead house; filled with dead things. But wasn't the house already dead the day they moved in?

What else is there?

We all need somewhere to live, that is a given. Shelter is one of the primary drives for the human being, and a house is a good way of providing that, so I am not about to tell you to go and live in a tree in the forest. But let us think back to the beginning of this discussion where we finally left the nest and branched out on our own, where we got the keys to our own place.

Our place. No one else's. This would be a place for me. No one else. Later, it became, our house, for our family, and we installed locks, and alarms to keep everyone else out. “The home must be protected at all times” you thought. “These four walls are mine. No one else's. This is where I feel safe. This is where I feel secure. I must protect myself and my family, but most of all I must protect my stuff; the walls and the possessions.”

But after we died, it wasn't our home anymore. Sure it may still be in our name but if you remember, we are now dead!

All those years of striving for the perfect house, the perfect neighbourhood, the perfect sofa and the perfect curtains, now ended with nothing, except death.

Pretty quickly, if the house isn't looked after, it will start to return to nature. The walls will start to break down, the carpets and the curtains will start to attract dampness, and the grass will grow tall. The bushes in the garden will start to grow wild, and nature will start to reclaim the four walls we spent our entire life striving to pay for. All those stressful late nights at work, all that moving, all that furnishing the interior, now means nothing. Do you understand? Everything you worked for is now dead, including you!

As dampness creeps into the floorboards, they start to rot, and the metal appliances start to rust. The house begins to take on an eerie smell, and all who go into it will feel uncomfortable. It will feel like “someone died here.” But we're not talking about the “spiritual,” we are talking about nature reclaiming that which belongs to it. Think about it. We never feel uncomfortable when we are out in any kind of natural environment, are we? Whether it be walking along a stream, out in the forest, walking in the hills, or just sitting under a tree. It feels good. It feels like you are alive. The same can't be said for the house you built.

The house that died before you moved in

When we move into a new house it feels “nice,” doesn't it? Everything smells clean and fresh, and if we don't move into a new house, we quickly rip out the old interior, and replace it with new materials. But let's not run away with ourselves thinking that what we are putting into the house is any way “new.”

The metals we create were extracted from ore which has been going through a process in the earth's crust for millions of years. The timber we saw was a tree growing for anything up to a hundred years or more. And the moment the ore is mined, the tree felled, or the cotton harvested, it is dead (starting to change state), and through building new houses or renovating old ones we constantly try to keep the materials “alive.”

So we buy new sofas, new curtains, new lamps, new windows, in a desperate attempt to stop the house from dying. We clean it obsessively, refusing to allow dust to build up, or have anything “dirty,” but it is a feeble attempt by humans to stop the inevitable happening. And through our labours we maintain an illusion that the house is “alive.”

Why else do you think we like having an open fire or candles burning? It is so we can experience life again, even for a short time. We buy fresh cut flowers to “brighten” up the place, and have to change them when they “die,” but can’t you see, everything we surround ourselves with is already dead. We buy plants and herbs and water them constantly to have some life around us, but one day they too die. Hard as we try, we can’t escape death.

The natural energies we surround ourselves within our four walls have no more life to give. The tree no longer has any roots, and the minerals are no longer connected to the earth’s core.

So... Maybe that’s why we like so much tv! Television is constantly moving, constantly changing, bringing energy into a home to revitalise it.

How many times have you gone into someone’s home and said “it just feels dead, like there’s no life in there?”

When we have children, they bring a massive amount of positive energy into a home, but in the end, they leave, and we are left with our dead possessions, our dead appliances, our dead walls and dead roof. It just feels like there is nothing alive except for perhaps the music system or the tv in the background. So what use is there to have a home surrounded by locks and security systems if all we are doing is imprisoning ourselves in a dead space?

Maybe that’s why we buy so many new things all the time? Maybe the consumer lifestyle is an attempt to bring life back to our homes, at least temporarily. “Wow, look at this new thing, it’s great!” we say, but soon it gets relegated to the attic or basement and is replaced by something “new.” Do you understand? So right now have a look around your home, and tell me what is alive? I mean really living, with its connection to the earth intact? Anything? Nothing?

People try everything to keep their homes alive. They learn feng shui (*rules in chinese philosophy that govern spatial arrangement and orientation in relation to patterns of yin and yang and the flow of energy (qi); the favourable or unfavourable effects are taken into consideration in designing and siting buildings and graves and furniture*) to create more positive energy flows around the home, but it is all too late, as the buildings themselves are dead. We even put in “water features” in our gardens to emulate the flow of a natural stream, and we hang up bird feeders to attract wildlife. But nothing works.

Soon we get tired of the house we live in, and we move to somewhere new hoping to re-stimulate the energies, and we get caught in a cycle that never escapes the dead materials. Some people talk of eco-buildings where they have a living roof of grass, and they may be onto something, but it doesn’t solve the problem of living with dead materials. They are everywhere.

As long as we continue to accumulate possessions, we cannot hope to escape this.

Breathing life into the dead

I do not have a “solution” that will solve all these problems. The city planners and the construction companies are deciding how we should live. The desire to create wealth and status determines where and how we live. Unfortunately, we have come so far from nature that we cannot hope to ever return to it. So I guess that means we are stuck with synthetic materials and dead wood, brightened up by the occasional plant, open fire, and water feature.

But is that really it? Is that the end? Can we not see a way out of this for ourselves? You may say: “But in order to create the four walls that protect me against the burglar and the elements, we must at least cut down trees, if nothing else.” But what are we talking about here? Are you saying you must have these four walls because you are scared someone will attack you and steal all your dead possessions?

If the possessions are already dead, why do you care? What does it matter if you lose all your possessions, things you desperately hang on to, and will fight anyone that tries to take them if you are going to die anyway. As far as I know, even religions that promise the afterlife, make no promises about inter-dimensional shipping of personal items. So I say unlock your doors. I vow to you I will do the same!

In order to remove fear of losing your possessions it’s not about saying: “I don’t care if I lose them,” we have to stop accumulating them. I have seen many monks with no possessions and they look perfectly happy! Not because they have found enlightenment but because they are free from the burden of fear that possessions come with. Do you understand?

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

The second is to find a way of living that brings nature back in through your front door! “What you must be mad, after what I paid for this house!” I hear you cry. But this isn’t possible whilst you still live at number 42 b consumer street. This will require a great shift on your part, and the possibility that you will have to let go of the individual to see yourself as part of the whole.

“I can’t believe it, he wants us to live in a commune in the forest like a load of hippies,” I hear everyone shout. But given the seriousness of the situation here on earth – especially in the westernised countries – we have to give our fullest attention to this problem.

We have to start asking ourselves what it really is we are doing here, and whether there is “something more” than just surrounding ourselves with four walls and shutting the door as quickly as possible, just in case someone comes in and attacks us.

We might like to think we are all “individuals,” that our home, and our stuff, is all that is important, but we are so much more than that; we are a community of the most intelligent species on earth, and the only thing individual about us is our thinking.

We have been told, by our parents, and our leaders, that building your own home is what you should strive for, that owning property is the single most important thing you will do apart from having a family; but that is just good business for the banks and the insurance companies.

So why do we close ourselves off from the world? Why do we lock ourselves in, watching life pass us by out the window? What is it “out there,” that we are so scared of?

We have to let nature back in, not shut it out

Maybe it all stems from our childhood, but I can assure you that it is not a natural phenomena. You don’t imagine for one moment that all the creatures that inhabit the earth are scared being out in nature in the dark, do you? That would be absurd.

Unfortunately, throughout our childhood, we are always told to be wary of strangers, and to lock the door when you come in. Given the amount of fear-mongering that goes on when we are young it’s lucky we even go out at all as adults! But we don’t like to be outside where there could be strangers for too long, do we? We unlock the door, get into the car, lock the doors, go to our work then back home again and lock the doors. This might be an extreme example, but can you see the point I am trying to make?

We have separated ourselves from nature and each other by all this individual living. Ok, so it *is* nice to have your own space, but not at the expense of not even knowing the people who live down the road, or even next door. What has happened to our communities?

We came from small tribes, where we worked and cooperated together, for the good of the community, and we had shared interests, shared meals and shared accommodation. Do you think the old community members were more unhappy than we are now? Or more scared of nature?

I am not suggesting a hippie style commune where we all live under the stars, singing songs round the camp-fire, where everyone does everything together, as individual expression always ends up being repressed in all idealistic communities. Why? Because they are created by Man’s thought, which as we have seen, has always caused mischief in the world.

But I would like you to think about this now. How can we get back to our natural state, where we exist in harmony with nature; where we live and cooperate together and still have our own individual expression? Think about how we can bring living materials back to our homes (if we really all need our own homes).

The problem with any of these questions we pose ourselves, is we are coming at them from where we are now. From our three bedroom semi-detached houses in the suburbs, and our cars, and our well paid jobs, and we can’t see a way out of it. But remember what we said earlier on in the discussion – there is no inter-dimensional shipping company. When you die, you leave it.

Wouldn’t it be nice to find out if there was another way, a way to live with nature, to explore the universe with your mind, to learn, without having all of these burdens, which died many years before. Wouldn’t it be nice to breathe life into our own living spaces. Real living energy?

I don’t want to live in a forest. I like my house!

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

The answer is quite simple, although I cannot tell it to you here. You must find out for yourselves. But I will give you a hint. It starts with letting go of everything you think you are, and everything you have acquired. It sounds difficult, but freedom doesn't cost a penny. Just a shift in your thinking. Right now.

You may either be thinking: "He's completely mad," or "how will I cope without the security of my nice house, I don't want to end up homeless." But homelessness in its purest form is merely a state of mind.

I feel sorry for the people who lie in the gutter in the cities begging for some money to fuel their addictions, or feed a hungry stomach; but what would happen if the homeless man was transported to a natural place where there was no one to beg from? What would he do? Would he die, or would he change? Would he realise he needed nothing more than already surrounded him, and create something new for himself?

So let's not all worry about being homeless. When we think like that we are thinking as the individual, not as the whole. But when we start to realise we are all connected, the thought of just letting go becomes a whole lot simpler. And the great thing is, you don't have to join a hippie commune to let go!

The earth is my home. Where's yours?

[Back to Index](#)

Honesty

1. *Not disposed to cheat or defraud; not deceptive or fraudulent*
2. *Without dissimulation; frank*
3. *Worthy of being depended on*
 4. *Without pretensions*
5. *Habitually speaking the truth*

Before we get started on this discussion, let's talk about what honesty is not, and that is truth. Sometimes we misuse language and don't even realise it. For example, an honest man does not always tell the truth, and as we will discover later on, truth is something which must be discovered individually, it is not a character asset as in "he always tells the truth." So with that out of the way, let us begin, with a question. How many of you tell lies?

Lie

1. *A statement that deviates from or perverts the truth*
2. *Tell an untruth; pretend with intent to deceive*

On a regular basis? Once every so often? When the situation demands it? Never? If you have selected never please go back to the top and reread the question!

We all tell lies from time to time, whether we set out to deliberately deceive others, or by just telling a "white lie" so we don't hurt someone's feelings.

"How did you like the dinner?"

"Mmmm," you say, "it was really lovely," as you crunch and chew your way through what could be described as concrete.

A white lie, as it is known, is thought to be an unimportant lie, normally used to be tactful or polite, and is thought as harmless. In fact if we didn't have these so called "white lies," we would all find it hard to get through our days without offending people. We use them to avoid potential conflict.

"Don't you love me?"

"Of course, I do."

White lies make our life easier, and in a strange way, make the life of the person being lied to easier. They allow us to seamlessly move through each day without noticeably offending people, and allow the recipient to carry on believing that everything they do and say is perfect.

Just imagine if everyone went round actually saying what they meant – the world would turn into a bloodbath! There'd be fighting in the offices, the restaurants, the homes and the shops. It would be a complete disaster. People would be getting upset all the time. There would be a lot more anger and violence.

"Hi! Do you want to come out for a drink with me tonight?"

"No, I think you're the most stupid and arrogant man I have ever met, I wouldn't go out with you if you were the last man on earth."

How would you feel?

So this is about not hurting people's feelings (*emotional or moral sensitivity (especially in relation to personal principles or dignity)*), isn't it? In fact, we don't care so much about their "feelings," as much as we care about what they will think of us. We don't want other people to think we think they are less than they think of themselves! Does that make sense to you? We are protecting our position in the relationship. But this forms the basis for a very shaky relationship, don't you think?

Sometimes, we figure that it isn't worth the hassle saying what we really think. We will only meet this person once, and we want to avoid any conflict with them, so we say what we don't mean. We lie.

Let's now look at the person on the receiving end of the lie. Do you think they want to be lied to? Do you think they want their "feelings" left intact? Do you think they want to believe that everyone liked the food, which was obviously burnt? In my experience, I would say a resounding yes! Why? Because I would like it.

Even if I knew the food I cooked for my guests was terrible, and it was burnt, and I know they didn't like it, I don't want to hear it from them. You see, I already feel bad about the meal, and I don't want to feel any worse. The little lie that says: "No alan, it *was* nice," makes me feel a whole lot better. What do you think? Would you prefer that someone was honest with you and said: "Sorry I didn't like the food, it was burnt," or would you like a little white lie that doesn't trample over your delicate "feelings."

The thing is, I knew the food was burnt, I knew it wouldn't taste good, but I served it anyway! Do I deserve to have my feelings hurt? Of course I don't. You see, my guests don't know if I'm (a) consciously aware that my food is burnt, or (b) just a terrible cook who has done their best, and thinks "burnt" is the way

it should be served! That is why the little white lie is more of a “feelings protection device.” Do we need one of those? We shall see...

Do you think I’m pretty? Of course I do!

The gap between what we think, and what we say, varies tremendously, on a minute-by-minute basis during the day. All credit is due to our wonderful human brain that manages to take in input, process it, think one thing, and at the same time say something else. We have learnt complex behaviours to cope with any situations, and generally err on the side of caution when answering questions that may be sensitive. You might argue that lying is a natural human process that oils the wheels of society, and allows us all to interact without conflict, but. And there’s a big but.

Perhaps we are just deluding ourselves about true selves. Maybe it would be kinder in the long run to actually tell me “alan, thanks for cooking tonight, but I’m not sure if you are aware that the food was burnt; in fact every time you cook, the food is burnt. I would be happy to give you some cooking lessons if you would like.” How would I “feel,” when I heard that statement? Would I be upset? Probably. Would my feelings be hurt? Definitely. But if I accepted my friend’s offer of cooking lessons, wouldn’t it be better in the long run? Now my friends would really be able to complement me on my unburnt cooking, and I would have the confidence to cook food, knowing it would taste delicious! Problem solved. No protecting my feelings. No lies. It’s a win-win situation, or is it?

So why doesn’t everyone remove the white lie from their vocabulary and replace it with constructive honesty, after all, criticism is worthless. It helps no one and it is better to say nothing at all, if you have nothing nice to say.

I know one reason I would keep lying, and that is because I don’t want to be seen as the bad guy. I want to be liked. Being honest with someone will probably put me in a state of conflict (however temporary) with them, and my human drive is to avoid conflict, which is why most british people – when presented with a tasteless meal in a restaurant – will answer, “oh, yes very nice, thank you,” when asked how the food is by the waiter, and then quietly complain about it in private! As long as I am not in conflict, everything will be fine.

So a white lie can also be seen as a “conflict avoidance device.” In the situation I described earlier, where my friend tells me my cooking was bad and offers me lessons, the result was a resounding success for honesty; but maybe it didn’t go that way. Maybe my friend *was* tactful, but I took it the wrong way. I took it as a criticism and an insult. I screamed at my friend he was an ungrateful bastard, threw him out of my house and never spoke to him again! What would be point of letting that happen when a little lie would save all that hassle? My feelings would be left intact, and so would my friendship. The food would still be burnt, but what’s a bit of burnt food compared with keeping my feelings and my friendship intact? This white lie is looking better all the time, and compared to a “real” lie, it’s almost the truth anyway.

A “real” lie is not like saying you like burnt food when you don’t, is it? A “real” lie might involve you telling a future girlfriend you are single when in fact you are married, still live with your wife and have three lovely children. Now that’s a real lie! Or, “sure this car’s reliable, I’m only selling it because I’m going abroad/getting a company car/going green and using my bike,” when you know it will probably break down half an hour after the unsuspecting person buys it. That’s a real lie. How about, “If you invest all your life savings with us, we will give you a guaranteed return rate of thirty percent per year, ” when in fact, you are just a conman, and will use these people’s hard earned cash to fund a life of luxury. That’s a real lie too, isn’t it?

Except they’re all lies, aren’t they? From not telling me about the burnt food, to ripping off some unsuspecting pensioner. It is how we judge the lie that is important. Its severity is only where we judge it to be on the “lie scale.” So losing all your life savings would generally be judged more severe than not telling me about burnt offerings! Would you agree?

With a lie, the intention is always to deceive. That is the definition.

I don't know how many of you have travelled to different countries, but if you have, you may have noticed that some cultures are more "honest" than others. For example, the restaurant scenario described earlier would be dealt with differently by different cultures. The British try to avoid conflict at all times in public, but the Americans would have instantly called the waiter over and told him that the food was terrible, and either he replaced it with something decent, or they wouldn't be paying their bill! Any British national would have cringed to see that, and we would mutter something about them not having any sense of decorum.

In Britain, we are horrified when people blatantly refuse to use the "conflict avoidance device" (c.a.v.)! We cannot understand it, because it is hard wired into our brain. So, is this c.a.v. something we are born with, or is it something we learn from our parents, our teachers, our peers, and our culture? As with most things, I would say it is a mixture of all of them.

As humans we are hard wired to defend ourselves against aggressors, to survive at all costs, and the inclusion of specific skills to avoid conflict where physical injury or death may happen would seem logical. Culturally, there is a huge gulf between different nations, with some choosing to speak their minds, whether it offends or not, and others choosing to use their language skills so as not to offend at any cost. Whatever the case, we all feel hurt when anyone lies to us and we find out. It's almost as if not knowing is better.

What wife wants to know that her husband has been having an affair with another woman for the past three years? You feel stupid when you have been lied to. Stupid for believing someone you thought would always be honest with you, or stupid for being cheated by a conman whom we believed. It is almost as if we blame ourselves for having been lied to. Whatever the excuse for lying to someone, there is no excuse, unless your life depends on it. That is when the "life preservation device" or l.p.d. kicks in!

People always make excuses about lying. "I lied to protect you." "I lied to you because I was ashamed." "I lied because I was afraid of what you'd say." But in the end, people only lie to protect or help themselves. There is no real intention to protect other's feelings. We lie to people because we can.

Just imagine for a moment that you couldn't lie for the day. There have been several comedy films which use this theme to great effect, but just imagine! How would you feel? It would be awful. You would have to be honest with everyone you met. The person in the office you disliked, the customer you wanted to sell an overpriced product to, the waiter in the restaurant when the food isn't up to scratch, your wife when she wears a dress you don't like, your best friend who has a bad body odour problem...the list could be endless.

How would you deal with these situations? Some may require honesty with tact, some may require a complete change in what you believe is acceptable behaviour to others (as in cheating others out of money), and if you are a politician, you may have to just not say anything for the day for fear of incriminating yourself. Here's a bold idea, why don't we all try to be honest with each other, even for a day. We have all sorts of national days. National cancer awareness day, national mental health day, how about national honesty day? Can you imagine it? The sad thing is, neither can I.

There is no point in ending this topic by saying "don't lie, unless your safety or life depends on it," you will. All I ask, and I will follow this too, is to be aware any time you are lying, and for the split moment between the thought and the lie, ask yourself why you are lying, and how you would feel if you got caught out? Who does this lie benefit? Only you will know the answer.

One last thing. It's a lot less stressful leading a life filled with honesty. Lies equal pain. Think about it. Give honesty a go today, try just one hour and see how long it takes you to build up to a whole day.

Lies hurt, but being honest may hurt even more!

[Back to Index](#)

Human

1. *Any living or extinct member of the family hominidae characterized by superior intelligence, articulate speech, and erect carriage*

Before we begin this topic, let's just say I am not about to go into a detailed discussion of history, evolution, or biology, I will leave that to the experts in those fields. I am not here to talk anatomy, feeding habits, or sexual behaviours, but I do want an in-depth discussion. About us. The human race.

Do you know what the difference between a polish man and a russian man is? Or a chinese man and a frenchman? Or an englishman and a pakistani? There's probably a hundred differences, you could write about culture, looks, or habits, some cruel and disparaging, others mere hearsay or observation. If someone asked you to describe the english, you may say:

- A. Drink too much
- B. Like fighting at football matches
- C. Curry is their favourite food
- D. Always miserable because of the weather

We like generalisations about other people, especially nations. We manage to stereotype millions of people into a popular view, whether true or not. Good or bad. It doesn't matter. We just like to have a rough idea of the type of people we're dealing with. So even if you are english, don't like football, curry, or alcohol, and actually love the weather, it doesn't matter. You are english, and that's what matters, so the stereotype is applied to you.

How many stereotypes do you have in your country about other nations? Think about it for a moment. How many people do you actually know from that nation? Have you ever been there? I can hear some of you saying: "I heard about the stereotypical greek men, and when I went, they were exactly like everyone said!" But the interesting thing is, that some people actually start to conform to the stereotype.

For example, the english have a reputation for drinking too much on holiday, so what do they do? Not try to show their hosts that they are not like this, but actually behave the way think they are expected to, and are proud of it! The same with english football fans. Everyone expects they'll cause trouble, so they do.

We all like to make judgements about people, even people we have never met. We have a pre-formed opinion of what they will be like, and we decide in advance whether to like them or not.

An italian man recently told me – on first introduction – that he in fact, didn't like "the english," but as soon as I told him I was "scottish," he said "oh, that's great, I love scottish people." He hadn't met many english, and he certainly didn't know any scottish people. He didn't know if I was a wife beater, bank robber, or axe murderer. He didn't care. As soon as he heard I was scottish, he applied all his preconceived ideas about the nation to me, and fortunately he liked the people from the country of my birth (even though I spent less than six years there).

So this application of a stereotype can't come from personal experience. You wouldn't say "All americans are thieves," because you once went to america on holiday, and someone stole your wallet, or "all indians eat curry," because you went to a restaurant and saw an indian man having a curry, or "all english are drunks," because you see one man drunk in a bar in england. That would be absurd, and no one would believe you if you said it. No, this has to come from somewhere a lot deeper, doesn't it? It needs a nation of people to feel that way about the other nation. This is not about one individual, this is about a whole country.

But where does the stereotype come from? Is it all myth, or is there some truth in it? Well, we would probably need to go back into history, where countries were at war with each other. This is where a lot of stereotypes were created, where opinions of "foreigners" were formed.

"I don't like foreigners, you can't trust them"

The world is full of foreigners isn't it? Over six billion of us! All foreign to someone. If we went to another planet that was inhabited, we would all be foreigners, think about that. Whether you came from south africa, indonesia, saudi arabia, india, iran, tahiti, or uzbekistan, they wouldn't care, because the place of birth on your intergalactic passport would be "earth."

Foreign

1. *Relating to or originating in or characteristic of another place or part of the world*

We all come from somewhere else; we all originated in different parts of the world, migrating through need for food, or through expansion of a nation. We all originated somewhere else. In the present day however, mass migrations have generally stopped, and people are happily settled into their various countries and ethnic groups, proud to be eighth or tenth generation, happy amongst their own people (humans who look identical and we assume are from the same country as us).

We like being amongst our own, like a lion with other lions, an ant with other ants, a wolf with other wolves. Except, there's a big difference here, did you notice it? You see, the lion doesn't want to be with the wolf, because he's a different species! But when we talk about being with our own, we don't mean the human species, we mean people from the same country, who look the same as us. That is a huge difference!

Same country of birth, and same language don't come into it. So if I say I am japanese, it is not enough to speak the language, live in tokyo and be born in osaka, because if I don't look japanese, I am not accepted as japanese! If you don't look identical in facial characteristics or skin colour, you are a foreigner, and that will never change. This means we are not only divided by land and language, but are divided by things such as, skin colour, eye shape, height, body shape, food choices and clothes.

There are biological reasons why we all look a little bit different. Perhaps it is to do with how we evolved in different climates, over thousands of years. But now we stand fully evolved as homo sapiens (*the only surviving hominid; the species to which modern man belongs; a bipedal primate having language and ability to make and use complex tools; brain volume at least 1400 cc*).

We are the most intelligent species on the planet, yet we are afraid of each other! And when I say each other, I mean humans who look different to us. We're more afraid of a muscular african than being attacked by a lion. We're more afraid of arabs than being killed by a scorpion. We're more afraid of the white man than we are of a great white shark. Why? Because we've got nature pretty much under control, we live in urban areas where there aren't too many scary things left.

Gone are the days when hunters would be watching their backs at all times, to make sure they weren't attacked by wild animals. We don't need to hunt anymore – we farm. We keep our animals under control, we don't let them trouble us too much. So we've got to be afraid of something, right? You've got it, each other!

If we are white, we treat the man from africa as if he is from a different species, the same goes for the chinese, arabs, indians, thai, vietnamese, and in fact anyone who doesn't perfectly fit the "white" brand. Of course you then subdivide the white man into nations, which although may be the same skin colour, may have different shades; and then into language (first by country, then by region). Then we attach a mainly derogatory label to each of them, based on some sweeping generalisation in order to further divide us – such as "fat americans" or "greasy italians." We have now created new sub-species of humans without even realising it!

Fear is perpetuated by rumour and insinuation, by media, by politicians, by teachers, by parents. They keep the fear alive by passing on their prejudices of people who are *exactly* the same as us! They may live in different types of houses; eat different bread; have dessert for main course; wear different clothes; eat rice instead of potatoes; eat animals we keep as pets; smell a little different because of the food they eat; believe in different gods, or have different customs, but these are the result of tradition, culture, and conditioning. Once we are naked, we are all exactly the same.

Imagine you are taking part in an experiment called "find your friend," where you had to find the person in the group who was identical to you. You are blindfolded and your nose is covered, to eliminate any chance of guessing through any distinguishing smell you may pick up. All the subjects are naked (male and female) and you have to find one male and one female, in a group of ten people, using only touch, could you do it? Perhaps you might get lucky. Perhaps there is something in your race of people that is prominent, like height or weight, but if the subjects were all the same weight and all the same height, how about now?

What does your race of people have, that others haven't? I am sure you will be coming up with all sorts of

slight differences, but what about major differences like a different number of legs, more eyes, less arms, no nose, or a mouth where the forehead should be? Eight toes on each foot? What about higher intelligence? Can you feel for that? No, I think we all agree that humans are identical, otherwise we would all belong to different species.

The differences are only man-made, created by people who want to be different, who want to be superior, who want to dominate and oppress, who want to wage war, who hate you because of your accent, who despise your colour, who, over centuries, have been conditioned by society that to be “foreign,” is to be mistrusted. We have our parents to thank, and their parents before them, and our teachers and our parents teachers, and our government and our parents government and back we go, century after century...

The conditioning is deep rooted, and so is our prejudice. We don't even know why we hate the english, although maybe 300 years ago their armies came and robbed our country and murdered our soldiers, but every country has been at war at some point in history. War is not exclusive to one nation. War and violence have surrounded us since the beginning of civilisation, and has clouded our judgement of people.

Do not tell me you hate the french, the swiss, the germans, or the russians. Hate is a strong word that cannot be used in terms of entire nations of people. You don't even know these people. You are remembering a story from history, where your nation may have fought theirs on the orders of your leaders, not because individuals hated you, or you hated them. I challenge every one of you to go and meet someone from a country you “hate.” You will find the only way to deal with people in the world, is on an individual basis, one person at a time.

*Remember what the place of birth would be on your passport if you went to another planet?
“Earth”*

If there is to be a future for the human race, whether in twenty thousand, or twenty years, we all have to identify with the world as our country, because it is.

On a clear night, have a look up at the stars, and count how many you can see. Twenty? Fifty? One thousand? One million? One billion? We are quietly spinning in what appears to be the middle of nowhere, with no one else around. A strange place to be indeed. It makes the fact you abused a man because of his skin colour, killed a man for his wallet, bombed a country because you didn't like them, or tortured a man for information, utterly worthless. So unimportant – apart from showing how cruel the human being can be.

Can you tell me what we have done to deserve the crown of “most intelligent species on the planet?” Can you tell me the mind that creates weapons and bombs is not sick? Can you tell me why we kill and torture our own species? It is indeed a sad day for me, because I believe the world would have been a better place, if we had not evolved into homo sapiens “*the most intelligent species on the planet.*”

When it comes to how we treat each other, we are no further forward than we were (even before) primitive times. We use our minds for greed, desire, destruction, and control. We kill and we maim, we steal and we acquire. We invent substances to shield us from reality. We are not ready for this power. The power that the mind has given us. We are not ready. We need more time. Our brains may be working, but our thought is corrupted.

We may have progressed materially and technologically, but in our haste we have missed one vital component, to know what it is to be human; to love one another, and to love the planet that gives us life. If I were from another planet, observing from space, I would cry for humanity. Such beauty on the earth, such abundance of life, such hope; all being destroyed by the human being, self-appointed custodian of the planet.

[Back to Index](#)

Humour

1. *A message whose ingenuity or verbal skill or incongruity has the power to evoke laughter*
2. *The quality of being funny*
3. *Put into a good mood*

I've always thought of myself as a pretty funny guy – often the life and soul of the party, never dull, always entertaining, that's me! I just love humour. It has almost got me into trouble so many times I have lost count, but still I keep on.

I'm not a joke teller, I can never remember them; I am more of a situational comedy sort of person, in that I listen to, or observe someone and make a funny quip about them, or the situation. I just see a lot of humour in what people do and say, but I wouldn't do it if I thought it would upset them. In fact that would upset me more. How about you? Do you have a good sense of humour or are you more of a serious type? Maybe you don't know any good jokes, maybe you don't think you have a sense of humour? Let's explore this together.

I don't know how I became funny, but people laugh when I am humorous and I like it, because it means I can laugh as well. I don't know if people take me less seriously than I would like because I never really thought about it until now. I like to mix deep humour with deep thinking! It keeps me grounded, and a little laughter goes a long way to making the world a happier place, don't you think?

As someone who has spent most of their life in offices, I have to say that I think there isn't enough humour in the world. People see their job as something they should be serious at, and only humorous outside work; or even worse, not humorous at all.

My father is one such good example. He spent his whole life being serious, even though, cloaked under all that seriousness was a keen glasgow sense of humour. He regularly chided me for being the office joker. "How do you expect to get on in life, if you can never be serious?" he used to demand; but there was one thing he missed, and it was that I was serious about my work. I always liked it, and always concentrated hard on it, but I could never understand what everyone else was doing! They spent their days moping around (sorry, being serious) never laughing, never sharing a joke, or if they did, it would always be restrained.

You see, we have this crazy system which seems to dictate that the higher up an organisation you go, the less humorous you become. My dad tells me that the reason is because people expect you to be serious; they don't expect the leader of an organisation to be telling jokes.

"If I was always joking," he told me, "they would never respect me."

That struck a chord with me.

It's all about appearances

"So if I want to get on in the world, I should start to look more serious and be less funny," I asked him.

"Precisely."

"How am I going to do this," I thought? "I want to be taken more seriously at work, but because I am good at what I do, not because of the way I hold my lips together, never smiling, save for a slight nod to acknowledge anyone in an inferior position." I wasn't prepared to play this game.

I thought by just being my cheerful happy humorous self I could get on in the world, but it didn't work like that. People saw it as a sign of weakness, a lack of sincerity, a lack of commitment, and exploited it at every opportunity. But I was committed to my job; I always put one hundred percent into everything I did. But whether they found my humour and joviality unsettling and wished they could be more laid back and still good at their job; or whether they just found it annoying, I will never know. But I started to notice more and more that I didn't fit in.

I was doing fairly senior jobs and my colleagues were all "serious." I think they wondered how I got the job if I was such a joker (on reflection, maybe I should have just kept my mouth shut, but I didn't). Everyone else just got on with their job without a word. I couldn't bear it. It was all so clinical. If we were going to spend nine or ten hours a day together, I sure as hell wasn't going to sit around with my face tripping me all day.

"If you want to joke around go and be a comedian, but don't do it here," my boss said to me once. I looked around at all the office personnel and realised that not one of them looked like they were having a good time. Some of you may be thinking, "you're not at work to have a good time, you are there for work." But the way I see it, if you are going to be spending on average 45 years, 5 to 6 days a week, 10 to 12 hours a day (including travelling time) for 48 weeks of the year, you really should be having some fun. There should

be laughter, there should be humour. After all, what is it we do as humans that is *so* serious we can't take time for a bit of humour?

Bosses seem to forget we are spending nearly all our adult life working. The way I see it, if they want robots, they should employ them. Do not make a human behave like a machine just because you pay them a few pounds for their labour. Let them express themselves.

I do understand the need to maintain some level of composure when at work, just in case you think I was running around all the firms I worked for telling everyone jokes all the time, and making silly quips – I may like a laugh, but I'm not stupid.

I think my dad thought that being humorous meant being seen to be less intellectual, something that would never do if you wanted to climb the high echelons of business, something I never wanted to do. I was happy earning good money, enjoying myself at work and then moving onto my next contract. Very content, I would say. Although the people I worked for probably weren't quite as content with my happy disposition.

So let's talk about you now shall we? I think I've talked enough about myself, as usual! Let's talk about the sort of person you are, the job you do, and the image you want to project to the world. Do you want to be taken seriously? Do you want people to listen to you? Do you want to get on in the world? Do you want to have a nice life? Then please stop pretending to be so serious.

Teachers, judges, lawyers, politicians, policemen, all have this seriousness about them that you know is a put on. You know that in reality they *cannot* be that serious. It is part of the costume. The same way people at work in an office are forced by their bosses to wear the "serious" costume. Please, if that's you, take it off! What's the worst thing that can happen to you? As they say: "lighten up," you cannot be that serious all the time (although as we know, there are times when it is appropriate).

Life is all about enjoying living, and humour helps us to release tension by laughter. It also helps shine a light on the falsity of serious people through the clever use of wit and satire. It is good for people to laugh at themselves, and it helps with awareness. No, honestly! It does. If someone makes a witty remark about your "bossy" personality, you are more likely to pay attention to the message than if they shout it across the room and insult you. One thing I have learnt is that if a serious message needs saying, it can sometimes help to dress it up in humour, it lessens the blow and can convey the message a lot more clearly and easily.

Stop pretending to be serious

I have met so many different people from all walks of life over the years, and I have to say that there is humour in everyone I have met. No matter what type of personality they had, each of them had the capacity for humour inside them – even my dad, who has been pretending to be serious his whole life.

We are born, we go to school, we work, we contribute to the world, we have children, we retire, we die. The end. We can make the decision to walk through life with a solemn face, or we could light it up with a smile and some humour, it really is a great characteristic we have developed over the years.

Remember, I am talking about inclusive humour here, where everybody laughs, even the person who may be on the receiving end; and above all, we need to learn to laugh at ourselves. We need to see how ridiculous we look sometimes. The things we say and even the clothes we wear.

If the animal kingdom has developed humour I'm sure they find us funny as well especially when we pretend we aren't anything like them.

Let go of seriousness. Bring more humour to your life. If your place of work wants you to be a machine, tell them to find a machine who is as attractive as you, and walk out. Do your own thing. Do not let yourself be led by others, especially those that want you to conform to their idea of what work should be. Let's bring comedy back to mainstream life instead of saving it for the professional comedians and the comedy festivals; and although some of you may not be as funny as others, it is better than spending your time pretending to be serious; trying to impress people with your "serious" facial expressions.

Just because you are a scientist, a chief executive, a politician or other "serious" person, doesn't mean you have to behave like a robot who has a line of code that states:

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

1. Keep face straight no moving of mouth or eyes.
2. Goto 1

You never know, people may even start respecting you for actually being human. It's really easy. Give it a go. You've got nothing to lose except that frown line across your forehead.

[Back to Index](#)

I

Illusion

3. *An erroneous mental representation*
4. *Something many people believe that is false*
5. *The act of deluding; deception by creating illusory ideas*
6. *An illusory feat; considered magical by naive observers*

Some people have said that the world we live in is just an illusion – that it is not real; and that somehow, we are being tricked into thinking it's real! But it looks real enough, it feels real enough, babies really do come from the womb, the trees really grow tall, and it does snow. So what on earth could they be talking about?

Talking of the earth – the photographs and video that the astronauts have taken of our planet prove it's real enough. A great big blob in the middle of nowhere!

If you look at the sun on a clear day it blinds you, and you do feel its heat, especially when sunbathing! So what do you think? Is it real? If all my five senses tell me this is something physical, something tangible, then it must be. But what does your so called sixth sense (*grasping the inner nature of things intuitively*) tell you? Think about that for a moment and then we shall begin our discussion.

I have often heard people saying: “Yeah, but we *could* all just be an experiment by intelligent alien life forms,” said mostly by people smoking marijuana, or drinking beer, both of which seem to loosen our grasp on what's real and what's not! But of course it's possible. We may think we understand the proportions of the universe, but we might be just a tiny experiment, or a game in somebody's shed. We might actually be much smaller than we think!

During the alien summer barbecue, alien al says to his pals over a bottle of alien beer: “Hey, do you want to come over and see how my human experiment is going? They're so dumb, you should see what they get up to!”

“Wow! That's great, and it all comes in a box?” says one of his friends.

“Sure does, you can get them up at the store. They're not cheap; 699 alien dollars, but definitely worth it! I have hours of fun changing their weather patterns, watching their crops fail, and planting lunatic dictators in countries to see how quick it takes them to kill everybody.” (everyone laughs) “The software it comes with is top notch. You can control everything. You can make people only like the same sex, or you can make people believe in 'god' and get them to pray every day.” (everyone laughs) “It really is funny!” “You can even get them to gain awareness and question the nature of everything. If only they knew.”

“Of course we are not part of any alien experiment! What a stupid idea” says you. “This book gets more idiotic by the page, I wonder if I could get a refund?”

The magicians slight of hand

So I ask you again. Is this world real, or have we been tricked by a clever magician into thinking that the universe started with a big bang, or that there was a god who created us all? Have we been tricked into thinking that we came from the apes millions of years ago, when really, the world has only been in existence for a short time? Do you see the importance of these questions?

We believe that everything is solid here, and it might be. Our houses do protect us from the rain, and our clothes and heating protect us from the cold. What I am talking about is the bigger picture. The one where we attach meaning to this life.

It is perfectly possible that we are no more than a backyard experiment being controlled by “alien al” on his computer. You may laugh, but it's no laughing matter. Why else do you think science hasn't been able to find the answer to any big questions, like how the universe started? This box we all live in, in the backyard, only started when “alien al” turned it on at the mains, and as it is only a one player game al has purchased, not the multi-player network game, he only gets one “active” world to play with, that's why the rest are “greyed” out and have no life on them! This life we live here could just be like computer simulation games, where we give our characters personalities, likes and dislikes, wants and desires. It may seem far fetched, but if we are to explore our minds, and the universe, we must look at every possibility.

Sci-fi film makers have pushed this point on many occasions, where in some films they saw a world controlled by a computer to make life seem real, but when the computer was smashed the people could see that the world had been destroyed many years previously and they were left in a barren land. Tough break!

There have been many great books and films in which the writer has imagined that this world is but an

illusion, and maybe they are right. But for now, we must leave the realm of fantasy, and leave “alien al” in his backyard shed, and come back closer to home, to look at someone we have an intimate relationship with. Ourselves.

Does the eye really “see?”

“Of course my eyes really ‘see’ what a stupid question.” I hear some of you cry. “I’m not blind, therefore I can see! Jeez this book. Really!”

A friend asked me once: “What do you see with, your eyes or your brain?”

“Your eyes!” I cried out immediately.

“I’ll leave it with you,” he joked.

But later I got to thinking about it. *Do* I see with my eyes?

I was very confused, but the more I thought about it, the more I could see the point to his question. Yes, the eye is the vehicle by which the light from all the objects is filtered through, but that’s all it does. It doesn’t have its own central processing unit. All “information,” (light) must go to the central processing unit (cpu) for processing.

The brain is where we see “table,” “happy man,” “angry man,” “pizza,” “wife,” “friend,” “house,” “cigarette,” “attractive girl,” “ugly woman.” Do you see? (excuse the pun)

The eye merely passes the information through to the brain, like a security guard that just lets everybody in. Nothing gets missed.

The brain then instantaneously pulls up record sheets and compares the object with its database record. Object round, has bits on top. Check memory. Had before. Check knowledge. This is called a pizza. Then perhaps the brain’s pleasure centres remember they had one pizza before, says to the consciousness: “I really fancy one of those,” but because you heard it in your own voice you think it was your idea!

Let us explore a little more deeply.

Is a chair really a chair? If you walk into your lounge, close your eyes and touch different objects, what happens? Go on try it sometime! As you feel for shape, texture etc. what is going on in your brain? It cannot “see” the object directly because the eyes are closed, but it is running some pretty impressive calculations. And from the size and “feel” of the object, your brain brings up a card that matches and says that is a chair! How does it do it?

Well, without getting into technicalities here, you were told to look at it when you were young, and your mother pointed at it and said “look! A chair” and that was all you needed to know. Your brain put the shape and the dimensions into memory and labelled it. Thus chair becomes object number 208,394, and everything that is associated with 208,394 will have links to that object. Do you understand?

I do not know the exact way that the information is stored because I have not studied science, but hopefully you can see what is happening here.

Your eyes are there as an evolutionary adaptation (the earliest organisms did not have eyes). They help us to hunt for food, and water, and they help us to navigate. Everything else is done exclusively in the brain. So even if you have been blind from birth, if someone lets you touch an object and get a “feel” for it, and then says “table,” it is no different. The only difference is that you have a precise visual representation of what a table looks like when you look at it. If you have no eyes your mind will put together a best guess of what a table is based on what it knows or what someone tells it. So now you know what table is.

“Will you ‘sit’ at the table?” your mother asks.

You have been told and shown what “sitting” is and you now know what “table” is, so you can sit down. But imagine no one had ever used words to describe anything, and now imagine that you cannot see with your eyes. How would you feel, how would you interact with the world around you? Now when someone says “sit at the table” you ask them what it means. To you and I who have gone through the process already this seems almost too simple but it’s not, I assure you.

Imagine you have someone round for dinner who cannot see, and has never been given detailed descriptions of objects before.

“Sit at the table, please,” you ask.

“What is table?” He asks.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

“Well a table is something that has four legs.”

“What is four? What are legs?”

“Well, legs support the table and are made out of wood and four is a number,” you reply.

“What is wood. What is number?”

“Wood comes from trees. Number is something you count with.”

“What is trees. What is number?”

“Trees grow in the ground and have leaves and branches. Number is a shape that you can add, subtract, multiply...”

“What is ground? What is leaves? What is branches? What is divide..?”

“The ground is where the tree comes from. It is made of soil. The leaves and the branches come out of the tree as it grows. I'm not sure what divide really is but I think it is where you take a number and try to... no, that's not right...erm...”

“What is soil?”

“Soil is the earth.”

“What is the earth?”

“It is where you live! Now hurry up and eat your dinner before it gets cold...”

“What is cold?”

You can see how infuriating it would be!

Now imagine you have another guest round for dinner who is not visually impaired but has never been told what anything is either.

“Sit at the table, please” you ask.

What is “table” he asks.

“The table is what I want you to sit at, look, it’s over there.”

And he sees it, and registers it as table. But he still needs to know more information. “I see that it is table,” he adds, “and you have said I should 'sit' there, but I do not know what 'sit' is.”

“Look, watch me. You take a chair.”

“What is chair?”

”...And you sit down like this” ignoring him and demonstrating it instead of explaining it.

So as you can see from our wordy example above, although the child who has vision understands the connection between what he is seeing and what he is being told, and stores the appropriate pattern maybe a little faster than the boy who can't see; the process is exactly the same. The brain is the one who “sees” things, the eyes merely filter in the light. Not that we should take our eyes for granted, they have helped us enormously.

But what harm have they done?

It is the eyes that see the black man in the “white area,” it is the eyes that see the jewish man amongst many non-jews, it is the eyes that see the “muslim” man in a “christian” country. We could go on for a whole book with examples, but I think we both understand?

We have said that in “reality,” it is the brain which is seeing, although the light is captured first by the eyes. A man who has in his mind that he wants to rape a woman, would still want to rape a woman if he was blind, being able to see just makes his identification of his target quicker. Do you follow?

If I do not know what a table is and then you show it to me, it is much quicker than having to explain everything. It is kind of like having a photograph to show someone of the time you went on a camel ride. You could explain it without the photograph, but the visual example has a faster impact on the brain. That's all.

So what is the point of all this talking about the eye not really being the thing that sees, “what difference does it make?” I hear you asking.

Well, if it's true, it means that the one thing we trust the most, our eyes, are not as reliable as we once thought they were.

Perception

A. The representation of what is perceived; basic component in the formation of a concept

B. Becoming aware of something via the senses

If I see an immigrant walking down the street at night with his hood up, what am I seeing? Am I seeing the shape of a body and nothing more? No. I may see his outline with my eyes, but already my brain has processed him based on the way he walks, his colour, my education, my parent's prejudices, my fear, my beliefs, my memory, his clothing, media reports or government reports.

In a flash, the message appears in my consciousness: "He is probably dangerous and could attack me, so I'll walk the other way."

So did I really "see" the man as he was? No I didn't. The information carried in the light through my eye was nothing compared with the amount of information I had to weigh him up with. In a millisecond, I had not seen a man walking, I had perceived him to be a dangerous person, even though he showed no outward signs of it!

One of my favourite examples of perception at work is that of the car crash, and I am sorry if I have used it in another topic.

On a dangerous bend in the road, a car accidentally crosses the centre line and hits another car almost head on. Fortunately, neither drivers were injured seriously, but the police were called anyway as a precaution. As the police were trying to determine what happened, two potential witnesses came up and offered their version of events. The first one to speak was a young man.

"Yeah, I saw, it, some old bloke was coming round the corner not looking where he was going, and must have let his car drift over the road and hit the other car."

"That's not what happened at all!" said the old lady. "The young driver was coming round the corner way too fast, lost control of his vehicle and crashed into that other man, who was doing nothing wrong!"

"Are you sure you two both saw this accident?" asked the police constable.

"Absolutely!" said both of them, "we were standing right on the same spot."

So, as you can see, two people can be looking at exactly the same thing from the same angle and both "see" it differently. They would both swear in court that that was exactly what they saw and no amount of questioning would convince them otherwise. How many times do we hear:

"Are you sure that's what you saw madam?" from barristers in court.

"I am absolutely positive!"

Then some new information appears that meant the woman could not have seen the defendant on that day, and she says: "... But... I could have sworn it was him... I know what I saw..." and she would be lead down from the witness box utterly perplexed as to what had happened.

Have my eyes deceived me?

It's terrible when you can't trust your own eyes, isn't it? "Maybe you need glasses madam?" the barrister might joke, but it is nothing to do with having blurred vision. It is seeing something that isn't there in 20/20 vision, courtesy of our old friend, the mind – master of illusions.

So if it is possible that we perceive things that didn't happen or weren't there, couldn't it be entirely possible that there were things in the world we weren't perceiving? Could it be possible that there is something that is invisible to us?

You see, we mustn't put so much emphasis on old phrases like "seeing is believing," because it just doesn't ring true. Remember, even the physical lenses by which we "see" the world aren't that good compared with say an eagle who can spot his prey on the ground from high in the sky; or the owl that sees the mouse scabbling about in the forest floor in the dark. So perhaps we should retire our eyes for a moment, and in the darkness, imagine a world we cannot see with our eyes. A world that is very different to the one you and I live in right now. What would it look like? How would you look? Would you be the same as you are now?

If we are to understand anything about ourselves, we have to open our minds to new possibilities. When

we talk about “real,” we are always testing something with our eyes and our touch. “Yes, it is real,” you say, “because I saw it with my own eyes, and I touched it.” But what is really real? Is the thought in your head real? Do you understand?

So perhaps we should drop the word “real” and “reality” from our vocabulary. Everything is real and unreal. It just depends on how you look at it! Ok, so you may be able to touch a “solid” object like your wife, but how long does she stay solid for? Until you look away?

I know this is rather confusing but bear with me. What we are saying is that although I can “see” her with my eyes and brain, and touch her with my hands making her “real,” does that mean she is always existing in that state, or does she dissolve into a different form when you take your focus off her?

“Don’t be ridiculous!” I hear you cry. “What sort of a stupid discussion is this? If I can see and touch her one minute she’s not going to disappear the next!”

But what we are saying is that when you look away, she has disappeared. Because you can no longer see her! We must not let our eyes trick us.

As we have shown on several occasions during this discussion, our eyes cannot be trusted. And if our eyes cannot be trusted, then we also have to question how much we can trust our own brain, which has been conditioned by parents, teachers, tradition, media etc. into judging what is real.

I think we have to admit to ourselves that we have no idea what “real” is, what absolute reality is, so we should stop professing to know! One thing’s for sure. It’s not what we think it is.

Illusion 1 – Human race 0

How many times have we been fooled by a master illusionist, or even an amateur one?

“Yes, I am positive. The ball is in the right hand,” you say. “Yes, I know which card is mine, I saw him put it back into the pack,” and then find that the ball is in the left hand and it wasn’t the card you thought it was! How do they do it? They trick you. They divert your attention away for a second and they switch balls or cards.

Some illusionists are ingenious indeed, and to this day, no one knows how they did their tricks; because they were tricks, right? They couldn’t actually be “real” could they? That would mean that the man had to be a sorcerer or a wizard (*possessing or using or characteristic of or appropriate to supernatural powers*) of some kind, and they “definitely” don’t exist, do they?

I don’t know, you tell me!

We have all read about wizards and witches (*a being (usually female) imagined to have special powers derived from the devil*), and seen films with them in; and we are always fascinated by the special effects, that have them controlling matter with just their fingertips, or their minds. But then it’s just a film, no one has these powers in real life, do they?

For many thousands of years, ancient civilisations have believed in magic, with one or more members of the society believed to be able to heal through the power of touch. Some tribes still have witch doctors who have “supernatural” healing powers.

Books of spells (*a psychological state induced by (or as if induced by) a magical incantation*) abound. Come on, you may not believe in all of it, but you are definitely fascinated, like most people. It would be really “cool” to have these kind of powers, wouldn’t it? To be able to get someone to fall in love with you, by just putting a spell on them, or conjuring up a spirit, or being able to have all the riches in the world, or to fly without a plane to support you, or turn water into wine, or be able to walk on water...

Some would say that by merely discussing this we should change illusion into delusion! But explore we must.

The problem lies in our thinking, and what we believe.

For example, we “know” that some people create illusions to make us believe they have done something with magical powers, but in the back of our minds, we “know” it wasn’t “real,” it was just a stage trick, like special effects are in films. So it makes it hard (or easy) to believe in real “magic.”

Some of us say: “He couldn’t have done that, it’s not possible, it must be a trick,” but imagine going back in time a thousand years with a 747 and showing it off proudly flying around the sky! Can you imagine what the people would think of you? They would say you were a great wizard able to command metal to rise into

the sky. They may be impressed, and hail you as a god, or they may burn you at the stake. Who knows what people believe..

So let me ask you this question: If I see that someone can move matter, with what only looks to be the power of their mind, what do I do? Do I instantly disbelieve it, or, on seeing that there are “independent” witnesses who have sworn that no trickery is being used, believe it and think to yourself, “that's amazing, I wonder how he does it?”

The problem lies with our eyes and our brain again. The eyes see something which looks “real” but the brain says: “No, this must be a trick,” or depending on your viewpoint, says: “Ok, this guy must have supernatural powers.” But what is supernatural (*not existing in nature or subject to explanation according to natural laws; not physical or material*)? Supernatural is just something we can't explain. Yet.

Imagine again that you travelled in time and showed the ancient civilisations the power you held in your hands as you detonated bombs, or managed to kill a man without touching him (with a bullet), or you showed them a nuclear bomb being detonated in this distance. What supernatural power would they think you had? It's like everything we don't understand. We either worship it or kill it!

So should we believe that people have healing powers, that they can cure the blind, make cripples walk again and turn water into wine? Sure, why not? Whether they really do have “healing powers,” what do we know anyway? We can't even trust our own eyes to tell us the “truth!”

Maybe some people do have access to knowledge we don't. Maybe they have a complete understanding of the universe and how to control it. Maybe they are from a future time (having discovered that time travel was possible) and maybe there is such a thing as a god, but then surely that would be the same thing as having a complete understanding of the universe and how to control it, no? And maybe they are just deceiving us like a master illusionist does; but how will we ever know the truth of it if we can't trust our eyes, and we definitely can't trust our brains?

Truth is something you experience, so you had better go out and experience it, although even a trick can seem real; so maybe we will never know whether it is possible to gain these magical powers. Maybe we will delude ourselves into believing that there are such things as supernatural beings who have ultimate control over the universe, or maybe we will start to explore all possibilities with our access key to the universe, our open minds, and truly find out for ourselves.

So what if there is no “alien al” sitting in his backyard, playing the latest version of “human universe 2,” and there are no such thing as supernatural beings, wizards, sorcerers, magical healers, and matter movers; what are we to do? What if we are all alone in this dark universe? What if this tiny planet, a speck of dust in the universe is all that contains life as we know it? What if there is no afterlife, no heaven and hell, what if this world is solid and there are no illusions, except the ones we go to see performed on stage? What would we do? How would we feel knowing that this was it?

Well I tell you one thing, I'd make every moment count! And I would make sure I enjoyed my time here and made sure that everyone around me enjoyed it too. But until I know the truth of it all, I will never stop exploring. Neither should you.

[Back to Index](#)

Important 1

1. *Of great significance or value*
2. *Important in effect or meaning*

What is important to you?

I'll rephrase the question What is the most important thing in your life right now? I am going to take a guess that you are *not* going to say your sports car, going out for a meal at the weekend, going down to the pub to relax after work, your career, your lovely house, or going on holiday this year. I am going to take a huge gamble and come out and say it. I think the most important thing to you in life is (a) your family (parents/children/partner), their health and their happiness and (b) your own health and happiness. Am I right, or even close to being right?

You see, I think that whether you're a gangster, a corrupt politician, a plumber, a nuclear scientist, a cleaner, a hit man, a clerk, a stripper, a director or a soldier, those are just jobs. Some are more questionable than others, but nonetheless, they are just your chosen professions. Even if you extort money for a living with menace, you still have a mother, or a wife and children to think about. You make money to provide the best you can for your family.

Even gangsters are in love. Think about it. Even people who kill other human beings are capable of love for their family. It's inbuilt. Hard wired. As far as I know, even presidents who start wars that kill millions of innocent people, love their wives and their parents. So for me it really comforting to know, that no matter what people do in life, whether violent, or peaceful, there will always be an emotional connection to our parents, and we will seek someone to love, and share that love by having children with them. Perfect!

What we are in fact showing here, is that even if people are beset by anger and hate, they still have the ability to show love for another human being. This is the single greatest step towards a more peaceful world. Just loving one person may not solve all the world's problems, but it's a good start.

My parents are the most important thing to me, not because my partner or anyone else isn't important, but because my parents have always been there for me when I needed them; and as they will (probably) die before me, I want to get to know them better. I want to understand more about their lives. I only seem to know them as "my parents:" two people who brought me into the world and looked after me – not as individuals with hopes and dreams; successes and failures; sadness and joy. So can someone please try to help me understand the following. If love is the most important thing to all of us, why do we act in ways that are the complete opposite of love?

Love

1. A strong positive emotion of regard and affection

We say we love, but how quickly we forget what that means when we hurt another. So how can we know love when we only apply it to one specific group of people (e.g. our family).

How the soldier cries, when his brother is cut down by a bullet. He loved his brother so much. He will avenge his death. He will find the person who did this and make him suffer for what he did.

Love and hate may be the opposite of one another, but they are closely linked. You have hurt the one I love so I will hurt you. The example of the gangster, who loves his family but is prepared to kill anyone and everyone who gets in his way is a great way to show the hypocrisy (*insincerity by virtue of pretending to have qualities or beliefs that you do not really have*) of the human race. I do not believe we really know what it is to love. We may like people, or feel bound to them because of a genetic or matrimonial link, but to love is so, so different. If you love you *cannot* hate, and if you hate, you cannot love. Please try to understand what we are discussing here, it is of the utmost importance.

The mind, like a camera lens, cannot focus on more than one thing at a time. When you bring one thing into focus, the other goes out of focus. You cannot love and hate at the same time. Even as a soldier, if you say "I don't hate the enemy I am killing, I'm just doing my job, I'm just following orders," please see that in the very act of killing, there is an absence of love and compassion for another human being. In the same manner, you cannot say you love animals, whilst enjoying a nice juicy steak.

So let's not pretend we are full of love as the priest who blesses the troops going into battle does. Anyone who takes another life or sanctions the taking of life does not know love.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

It's time to stop pretending and find out what it really means to love, that is the important thing in life.

[Back to Index](#)

Important 2

1. *Of great significance or value*
2. *Important in effect or meaning*

When questioned about what is important, it is fair to say that most people do not want to appear selfish. That's why we say: "The most important thing to me, is family;" but in reality, that isn't the case. I think we should stand up and be honest with each other, and say, "Do you want to know what's important to me? It's *me*. I am what's important to me." Is it true?

All my life, I have only been concerned about me. My job, my car, my problems, my desires, my money, my holidays, my stress, my relationships, my struggles. The world revolved around me. But a few years ago whilst travelling through a poor country in asia, I suddenly thought, "Stop! What am I doing? Am I so concerned for the "me" in life that I am forgetting everyone else in the world?"

Of course, some will say: "You have to look after number one. If you don't, who will?" And I'm all for people looking after themselves, and working to provide for their family; but what I'm talking about is the realisation that whatever I do in life, affects others. This isn't about suddenly becoming philanthropic (*generous in assistance to the poor*) or running off to india or africa to help people who cannot fend for themselves. It is the clear realisation that we are all connected.

Connected

1. *Being joined in close association*
2. *Joined or linked together*

How is it that we are all connected when we are geographically and culturally so diverse? Well, the first thing that connects us is that we are all human! Oh, sorry and let's not forget the animals who provide us with milk, or the animals who unwillingly give up their lives so we can taste their flesh, or the streams that flow into rivers to give us water, or the trees that provide oxygen for breathing that we cut down for paper. I think you get the idea!

Not only are we connected to each other by way of being of the same species, but we are all connected to the planet and all forms of life are connected to us. We are all interdependent. Whatever we do can affect the planet and whatever the planet does can affect us (for example: tsunamis, volcanoes exploding, earthquakes, floods, crop disease, animal disease).

If I were a human, I'd be treading very carefully on this planet; it seems as if we could unbalance it very easily. Oh, I forgot, I am a human; and am I treading carefully? No I'm not.

Some of us on earth feel strongly about certain issues such as hunger, war, poverty, health, the environment, or global warming (which are all worthwhile causes I grant you), and we campaign tirelessly to "Stop The War!" "No More Hunger!" "Stamp Out Poverty!" But are we missing a vital clue in how to solve them?

There are a million campaign groups out there, each with their own agenda, each lobbying parliament; although some are successful, the fact remains that individuals have the most important part to play in the world. An individual thinking and acting independently, whilst acknowledging that they are connected to everything in the world, can solve any problem.

Think about it. Most people believe that the only way to effect change is through outside pressure, through convincing someone else to act, but the importance lies with us. Our individual thought, followed by our resulting actions, all affect someone or something in the world. Everything we do; from the time we get up, until the time we go to bed, is having an effect – positive or negative. And because we think mainly about ourselves and our families in isolation, we don't even realise we have had an effect! We are so unaware of ourselves in our surroundings that we can't comprehend the idea.

So just for a moment let's step outside the *me* to look at real life. One day in the life of alan, an average employed working human being in the west. You may not see anything in this day as significant, but try to look deeper and see the connections.

"I get up in the morning and I take a nice long hot shower to wake up. I have a quick coffee, it's from the finest beans in costa rica, but it's quite cheap at the supermarket. I like to have a dash of warm milk, and I'm

sorry to say, a couple of sugars. I always get up a bit too late in the morning to have anything to eat for breakfast, so I usually grab something on the way from the takeaway cafe to eat in the car. The journey takes me over an hour in the morning thanks to all the traffic, but my car's much more comfortable than public transport.

I usually arrive at my office a bit stressed, but after another couple of coffees and a cigarette, I feel better! I work for a multinational organisation with offices in twenty countries. We make everything from security products to aviation products, and even have a food division. Sometimes sitting at a desk all day can be really boring and the hours are long, but the pay is pretty good, and the life I have been able to make for my wife and my four children has been great. We have a nice house in the city with all modern appliances, although there isn't really much of a garden to speak of.

My wife has to work as well, as the mortgage is so expensive on the house, so we have to scrape enough pennies together to pay for child care so that there is someone to look after the kids when they get home from school. Hopefully they will all go to university and get good jobs with better pay than I get, then they can look after us in our old age! At the weekends we go out on family trips in the car, and we always go to church on a Sunday..."

So what was significant in that little story? Anything? Nothing? Did you see anything of yourself in this example, or did it all go over your head? That's ok, it is hard to see that anything you do is having an effect, whether negative, or positive in the world; but it is precisely that lack of awareness that is causing us so much trouble.

I am sure none of us really set out to make trouble for ourselves and other people, and most of you would be really offended if I told you that most of what our example character above was doing was having a negative effect on himself, his family, the community and the wider world in some way or other; but you have to start to look beneath the words. I don't want to spell it out to you here, but please look back over the short story as many times as you have to.

It was in understanding something similar that set me off on my own journey, which has enabled me to write this book. Something along the lines of, "Hey, if people eat fast food, they drop lots of litter, where does that litter go, and anyway, why do they need fast food...?" Ahh, because they work in jobs that take them miles from home, and who are the companies they work for miles from home? Certainly not companies that are serving the local community, and why do the job anyway? Ah ha! To get money to pay for a house and pay off the credit cards you have been running up buying stuff. And so why do you buy stuff? Well, to keep up your status in the community, to keep yourself happy, and why do you need to keep yourself happy? Because you are afraid, so what do you do? You go to church and pray that everything will be ok, and a man reads from a book that tells you everything you need to know etc. etc. and this book was born. So you see how important it is to see the connections.

You don't have to force yourself to look. Just start to be aware of one thing, and see how it spreads to other things. For example, whilst watching the news, there may be a short piece on a war that soldiers from your country are taking part in, just ask yourself a question like: "Why are they there?" And wait for a response! Your mind will start opening up, I assure you, but as soon as you start agreeing with the tv, your mind will be closed once again.

To make the connections, you have to ask questions; and you must watch your mind carefully so it doesn't reply with a conditioned response (because it will, as you are already conditioned by the society you live in). When it does, ask another question. Challenge the conditioning. Ask another question and another. Pretty soon your mind will have to open its doors to one who knocks so loudly.

Question, question, question.

Why? Because all is not as it seems in the world. It is of the utmost importance you make these connections. Do not wait or hesitate. Find out for yourselves. Right now.

[Back to Index](#)

Important 3

1. *Having authority or ascendancy or influence*

Just what is it to be important? I am the managing director of a company or the president of the country. I may have a job which affects a good many people, but that's just a job; what I want to discuss is the psychological feeling that goes along with that job. We have worked our way through the ranks (or not) and we are at the top. The apex of our lives, and we like to let everyone know we are there, that we have made it! But is it real?

I would suggest that this importance is only in our minds. We have the respect (*an attitude of admiration or esteem*) of others, not just for what we have done, but because we are in a position of authority (*the power or right to give orders or make decisions*), and we know that this gives us superiority over others. Although this superiority is superficial, in the sense that we are only comparing our relative position in society, this still appeals to our egos. Why do we feel differently about ourselves when we are in this position? We walk taller, we feel stronger, we acknowledge subordinates in a kind of knowing manner; we feel more godlike, in the sense that like the image of god who is above us all, the man in the position of power feels he is above others.

If we think about this rationally, when we all strip off our clothes, the judges, politicians, directors, and army generals are all the same as everyone else – just a collection of bones, muscle, and tendons; although that is not how we like to see ourselves! Why? Let's approach it from a different angle shall we?

In most species, there is the leader of the group, the dominant male, and this can be seen in every documentary about the natural world. In the animal kingdom, a male will challenge another male for superiority, territory, and the right to breed with all the females. In the human species, there is always a male challenging another male for superiority. It can be seen throughout history where one man has proclaimed himself “king” and beaten all of his opponents into submission (usually through extreme violence).

In countries where there is a king, he is still the most important person in the land, even when he is just a figurehead and the real power lies with the government. In some countries, he is even revered, but he got to that position by taking out all of his enemies, one by one.

In this modern age, the king is no longer fighting for his position physically, and the title of “king” is handed down through members of his immediate family. He parades around in the finest clothes and lives in the largest houses in the land. His position is on top. He is above everyone else. There is no one but “god” above him (or so he thinks). As can be clearly seen during revolutions, when the people have had enough, the king is the first one to go!

So why do human beings want to be the king? Well, first and foremost, we are still apes, and groups of animals need a leader – especially in the ape world. The only difference is the size of the group. So instead of ruling ten or twenty subordinates, we rule fifty million. The process is the same, it is just that through the creation of a super group (the country), the leader has ended up leading millions of people.

All hail, the supreme ape leader!

So maybe all this need for authority and supremacy is just natural, and it is as much a part of us as the need to procreate, so perhaps we shouldn't worry. All we are doing is expressing a natural urge, and as our minds have not developed much in the last several thousand years, perhaps it will take another million years of evolution for us to no longer need to have authority and control over others. But why should we wait?

We may want to feel important, but it's not really helping us build a peaceful, intelligent, sustainable world, is it? In fact this need for importance is damaging us and the rest of the natural world every day.

We don't have to be a king, we don't have to have authority over others. We do not need this. The world is abundant, there is plenty to go around. We do not need to fight for the right to mate with females, all we have to do is buy them a drink and talk to them! We do not need to build castles and have servants – a simple house is all we require. We do not need to dominate and exercise authority over people who work for us. We just need to reorganise the way we work. Do you see?

Once we transcend the need for status, and we recognise we are all one on the planet, why would you want to be more important than your brother? It's as if there is a tiny switch in your brain that says “On. Must have more importance than others;” but turning off that switch is as easy as asking yourself the question,

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

“why?” And allow your thinking to come up with a million reasons why it is not only good, but indeed essential for you to have more importance than others. As with the previous important topic, the only thing you have to do is keep asking yourself why? Why? Why? And eventually your mind will open, and you will realise in a flash that actually all this feeling important stuff is all nonsense.

**

When you die, how important are you? “Ah,” says you, “but it is better to be remembered by others who will say: 'yes he was an important man,' than not remembered at all,” but that is a mere projection of the brain wanting to keep itself alive at whatever cost. Soon you will be forgotten, and even if you aren't what does it matter! You are dead. You cannot hear the people talking about you, but you would like to, wouldn't you?

“Hello, look at me, I've made it. Look at my riches, look at my wife, I am a leader, I am powerful, I am someone, I am powerful.”

But underneath all of those riches and bolt-on accessories you call having made it, what is left? You, my friend, just you; naked, with skin covering muscle and bone.

Who are you now? Are you still important? Are you still great? Are you the king now? No, you are the same as every other human on the planet – except now you are free. Do you understand? Maybe one day, when you get a minute in your busy schedule, just undress in front of the mirror and stand and observe yourself for a moment. Who are you now? Are you still the man with the sports car, the fine clothes, the credit cards, the business empire, the adulation of others, the authority or the power? No, my friend, you are just like me, and I am just like you.

Our minds want us to think we are something different to give them something to cling on to, but we are all the same. It is time to realise that, and give up our designs on being important, after all, it means nothing.

[Back to Index](#)

Information

1. *A collection of facts from which conclusions may be drawn*
2. *Knowledge acquired through study or experience or instruction*

Where do you get your information from? What type of information is it? Who tells you what's going on in the world? How do you know what they are telling you is "the truth?" Like most people, including me, you get information from newspapers, radio, magazines, television, and the internet.

Apart from the internet, the other forms of media have been around for years and have been known to use propaganda (*information that is spread for the purpose of promoting some cause*) many times; in fact I would say you never know when the information you are reading or watching is factual or propaganda! That's a scary thought, isn't it?

It might sound like I am scaremongering but that is not my intention. You see, every media outlet is owned by a government, a company or an individual; and at the heart of everything, there is the individual, with his own bias, his own political leanings, his own agenda, ready to push that out into the world. That's not new, as everyone has their own views; unfortunately media owners and governments have a powerful platform with which to air theirs.

Newspapers, magazines, radio, and television are push media. They push the information to us and we have no control over its content, as opposed to the internet, where we pull the content we are interested in. Do you follow?

Whether we like it or not, and even if the media content providers are not attempting to brainwash (*persuade completely, often through coercion*) us, we are subjected to what *they* think we *should* read or *should* watch. Of course you are at liberty to turn it off or not buy the paper, but that's not going to happen, is it? We love reading all the news stories, we love watching terror on television, it's exciting isn't it? You get to be part of the action without having to take part in the war.

I don't know if you remember the first gulf war in the early nineties? It was the first real war to be broadcast live across the world. A real media event! We were taken inside the action: Booom, Bang went the bombs. We saw an Iraqi target in the cross-hairs of the gun sight then, boom it went up in smoke. "Yeah!" Went the crowd, "another damned iraqi blown to bits, we'll show them." Analysis followed analysis. Reporters giving different angles and views on the stories, 24/7.

But of course, these were *our* news stories, put together to show the glory of the western troops against the oppressor and dictator of Iraq, and you didn't see reverse angle camera work of the iraqis in their homes just before their bodies were blown to pieces by the bombs, egged on by the viewing public at home, and in the bars shouting: "Yeah! We got ya!"

The next live main event came at the beginning of the twenty first century. Commonly known as 9/11, it was the footage that "shocked the world," and started a whole new war (with live viewing available).

You all remember the images of two planes supposedly hijacked by terrorists and flown into the twin towers of the world trade centre. About 3,000 people died, but as far as the media were concerned, it was a godsend. Live disaster! Millions of viewers! Massive advertising revenue potentiality in the breaks! What a story that was. Even years on, people are still talking about it. Certain governments are still using it to support their "war on terror," which is just another excuse to kill people, if you don't mind me saying.

Who knows what the truth really was on that fine september morning in 2001, but there has been growing evidence in the alternative media that all was not as it seemed that day; that perhaps the government had a hand in it themselves in order for them to pursue a cause in the middle east. They do say that truth is stranger than fiction; but then again what agenda is the independent media provider trying to push? He is clearly anti-government, so what's to make us believe that what he is telling us is the truth?

Can we ever be sure that what is being told to us on tv, radio, magazines or newspapers is the truth? The clear answer is of course, no, but this doesn't mean we should all become paranoid we are being lied to, manipulated and controlled, after all, you can turn off the tv and not read the newspapers.

To understand this more clearly, we must look behind the motivation of those who disseminate information, and remember who these people are. First, they are people with their own opinions, second, they are in business to make money, and third, they are easily manipulated by government.

Remember bad news sells more newspapers

Have you ever thought about the content that is pushed to us? There's not much good news is there? Maybe a little light hearted story about a fluffy kitten that was rescued from a tree after thirteen days, read by a smiling newscaster, just to make us feel or nice and warm and fuzzy inside. But you can't imagine them putting on an hour's programme about good news, can you? People would turn off in a second; and they certainly wouldn't buy the newspaper. Would *you*?

We want doom and destruction, violence and murder, but we also want to see that someone is doing something about it; and of course there is. The government.

If there is a story about a “possible terrorists attacks” in london, there will also be police and government spokesmen telling how the government is introducing a new bill to detain “potential terrorists” for extended periods of time. If there's a story about someone dying in a drink driving accident, there will be a policeman to tell how they are “clamping down” on drink drivers to “stop the carnage on the roads.” If there is a story about a young boy being stabbed to death by a gang, there will be government officials and police detailing on how they are “clamping down” on knives and gangs. If there is a story about heroin dealers selling to children, there will be a spokesman saying they are introducing a new bill to lock up heroin dealers for longer periods if they are convicted.

Fear followed by reassurance

That is what news media do. They make us afraid by showing us some terrible event, then make us feel better by showing what someone is doing about it. I am surprised that no one has picked up on this. This is formulaic news-casting. If you think about it closely enough you will see for yourself..

Images and news stories are used to get us to feel a specific way and that is where the control element comes in. Can you imagine how you would feel if after every story there was no one to tell you it was going to be all right? They know what they are doing in the media. These stories are designed to keep you hooked; to make you scared when the bad guys are around, but eventually the good guys win (ring any bells?). Sounds just like a hollywood movie! And that's exactly how push media should be treated – as entertainment; nothing more.

Please think about this for a moment will you? How deeply interested are you in the topics you read about; I mean *really* interested in? Enough to investigate more, or just enough to discuss it with your friends, family, colleagues, or your mates down the pub? Everyone likes to talk about the stories they read or see on the news, it makes the day to day conversation more interesting, where suddenly, we can talk about terrorism in a real way, discussing the ins and outs of the potential threats to our lives: But only until the next big news story arrives.

I have even found myself becoming an armchair commentator on such subjects; subjects I have no real knowledge of, and come to think of it, no deep interest in. After all, if we actually thought we could be under attack at any time, we wouldn't just be sitting around talking about it would we? Or would we?

You see, news is something that happens to someone else; we never really imagine that we will be involved in a terrorist attack or abducted by a serial killer, do we? How many of you have been involved in something which was on the news, or even known anyone who was on a news story? Not many probably. News for us is like a fantasy land where the players are actors, and we are just the audience; and that's the way we would like it to stay, thank you very much.

Entertainment provided for us in our living room, on the metro, on the plane, on the train. Press the red button, get the news in ten different windows, different stories, different angles, satellite, cable, terrestrial. Get your news here while you still can! “... And did we tell you the world's about to end, but here's some pictures of a nice fluffy cat rescued in a tree to make you feel all warm and fuzzy inside. Back in a moment, after a word from our sponsor...”

All push media should come with a warning sticker: “*for entertainment purposes only.*”

Real propaganda

If we believe that western papers are prejudiced, filled with propaganda, then maybe we should take a look at

some other countries. At least we live in a democracy. Their media looks the same as ours, feels the same as ours, sounds the same as ours, but the content is deeply disturbing.

Governments tightly control what is published and broadcast. This is not the prejudice and bias of one man, but of a system, a system to control the minds of the people: To make them believe what is being said is “*THE TRUTH*,” and unfortunately, due to lack of any other outside information, they believe *the truth*, instead of dismissing it at best as entertainment, and at worst, brainwashing.

They believe that other countries are evil, that their country is the best in the world, that their leaders are the most righteous, that their people are the most pure, the most intelligent, the list could go on and on. This is where media gets into dangerous territory, where they are actually feeding false information to the people as truth. If you live in a country controlled by either a dictator or military junta or live in any country with a regime as opposed to a democratically elected government you can be sure your media is tainted by propaganda.

Please, what ever you do, turn it off. Don't read the newspapers. Don't listen to the news. Don't watch the tv.

That sounds extreme doesn't it? But how can you be sure that what you are being “pushed” is the truth? If we (in the west) cannot be sure we are not being fed propaganda – and we have a freely elected government, and free media – then how can you be even one percent sure your media is not only filled with lies, but information to make you feel a specific way about your own government and the other people in the world?

This is vitally important. Please listen for a moment.

You may not be interested in thinking for yourself, you may not care what is happening inside your country at the moment; you may only be interested in your wage, and your family. But if everyone just rolls over and lets someone else tell them what to believe, what sort of civilisation have we built as humans? One of our greatest faculties is the power to question, isn't it time to use it?

Unfortunately, getting real information is hard – even if you do want it – especially in tightly controlled regimes. The one tool that is available is often controlled and monitored by the security services, which seems to be happening in more and more countries.

The power to question

Of course, it's the internet. Established many years ago as a tool to share information between universities, it evolved over the mid nineties as the full blown internet, which enabled people to send electronic mail to each other, create websites to share information, and sell products, amongst other things.

In the beginning it was dead slow and stop, but now with more advanced communication technology, it can be lightning quick to display content, including streaming video and audio; and the one incredible thing about it is it isn't censored! “How can this be?” I hear you ask. Well, content is uploaded and stored and viewed in so many different countries that have so many different laws, it is impossible to control legally; but that doesn't mean that the security services are not monitoring all traffic and websites even here in the “free” west.

Governments don't like to lack control. They have passed laws over centuries, and have established police forces, and armies and courts and prisons to control subservient populations. They do not want to lose control, but at the moment they have. You can say anything you like in cyberspace.

For the first time in human history, the people have the power, and they know it. Never before could you criticise your king or queen and get away with it.

There are websites on every topic; free information about everything you could imagine; a million different views about the same subject; independent media, contributed to by people from all over the world; and most of the content is free. What could be better than that? Now you don't have to listen to what they want you to hear.

No longer is the media being pushed at you, now you can “pull” exactly what you want; and if you're not happy with the first one, you can look at another one, and another one, and you can comment on what other people have written, and you can even create the content yourselves! You can be in charge of your own newspaper. You can write your opinion and people can view it or choose not to. It's their choice. Worldwide campaigns can be organised in a matter of hours, and groups with common interests can share information...

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Except, according to recent studies, we're still doing it. We are addicted to it, and we can't help ourselves. That's right. Pornography.

I won't lie to you, I've spent many hours in the past looking at it, but the more I thought about it, the more I became worried that we were using the only free medium to express opinions around the world for nothing more than cheap thrills.

Stop wasting your time looking at porn and use the internet for something that benefits others!

We've had our fun. There's only so much porn we can look at in life isn't there? Surely ten or twelve years of using the internet to jerk off (*Get sexual gratification through self-stimulation*) to is enough? Isn't it time to wake up to the fact that the internet will be locked down one of these days and we won't have done a thing to stop it happening.

"If only I hadn't been masturbating to porn, I could have done something to save it" I hear you cry. And it will come. Do you really believe that world governments will leave something this powerful out of their control? Control is essential.

Talking of control, do you know who's really in control of the internet? Have you any idea how the internet even works? How you get a web page that is stored 10,000 miles away on your screen in less than a few seconds? Well maybe it's time to wake up!

Large businesses are in control. Telecommunication companies, hardware manufacturers, software developers, that's who's in charge. They like the idea that the customer has control because it's good for business, no other reason. But it won't be long before the governments of the world start forcing these companies to spy on their customers as a condition of doing business there. It has been said that one of the largest search companies in the world has agreed to bar the search of certain words like "democracy" and "freedom" from its search engine in order to do business in one undemocratic country.

You must remember that companies are not the keepers of world ethics, they are in business to make money and while a free internet serves them now, a controlled internet may suit them in the future. They will do whatever it takes to stay in business, please remember that, while you sit ogling women in various sexual positions.

Democracy without an agenda

The internet is the voice we have as a world population; where people from anywhere, of any religion, country or language can come together. Without it we are divided, living our own lives and own cultures, oblivious to what is going on anywhere else except for the information that the traditional push media and the government wish to disseminate to us. We must use the internet to include everyone in the world; to make sure everyone has a voice. The internet is the only democracy without an agenda. It is not trying to become more powerful, and it has no ideologies. Everyone is free to say what he or she thinks; and the more views there are, the more of a balanced informed decision we can make about things.

We cannot listen to our governments or our traditional media as a source of information anymore, the information has become so contaminated, as to render it worthless. We must create our own information, about any and every topic. We must sow the seeds of doubt in the minds of those who are tightly controlled in their own countries, so they question the information they are currently receiving. We must offer the hand of friendship to all.

Whether the information is about news, politics, religion, culture, compassion, car mending, gardening or mental health, the internet is an amazing resource. It is such a pleasure to see people sharing their knowledge and wisdom without charge. Most websites are free and we should all contribute where we can, with whatever we know, and put it on the web.

It is the greatest repository of instantly accessible knowledge we have today. Let's use it for the benefit of everyone on the planet, and keep it out of the hands of meddling governments and people whose only motivation is money. How? By coming together as a world community, united in the love of freedom to think, say and do what you wish without interference.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

The governments would say they are controlling what they need to, to help us. To keep us safe from terror, death and destruction – but they would say that, wouldn't they? It's their job to make us afraid, and then offer us solutions, isn't it?

Start a website, contribute to one that already exists, comment on a news item; whatever your view, whether it's extremist, or moderate, or even small, you all have a voice. Use it.

[Back to Index](#)

Insight

1. *Clear or deep perception of a situation*
2. *A feeling of understanding*
3. *The clear (and often sudden) understanding of a complex situation*
4. *Grasping the inner nature of things intuitively*

Insight is often talked about as being a sixth sense that some people possess, and it is true that most people do not possess much insight into their everyday lives, let alone the “inner nature of things.” Until recently, I would have said that I possessed between zero, and half a percent insight.

I carried on my daily struggle in life, never paying my bills on time, drinking too much, getting involved in unhealthy relationships, borrowing money left, right, and centre, and generally making a nuisance of myself to my parents, who thought I had definitely lost the plot! I was a walking disaster, although I had a nice personality, and could make people laugh.

I couldn't see anything wrong with my life. I was intelligent, had the ability to get good jobs (although usually ended up being fired for quarrelling with the bosses), and always had attractive girlfriends. My life rolled along fairly hectically, but I liked the “buzz” I got from constantly changing situations and moving house and job. Insight was not a word I knew. I couldn't see what was going to happen in the next 24 hours, let alone understanding what life was about.

It all changed when I upped and left my highly paid contracting job in information technology, to go and travel in australia – although several years passed before I got my first insight. It was not a religious experience; simply that my australian girlfriend told me that flicking your cigarette butts on the street, “not only caused litter, but was harmful to the environment, as they took so long to break down.” I remember the moment so clearly.

I was standing at a crossroads in sydney. Suddenly I got a flash of insight; the first ever!

“Yes,” I thought, “it does cause litter, and someone has to pick it up. That's not good. I don't want to do something that harms the environment, after all, my girlfriend seems pretty smart, and she wouldn't tell me to stop doing something if it wasn't important.” So I never flicked my cigarette butts on the floor again (not that it stopped me smoking you understand), and I was quick to point out the same thing to anyone else I saw doing it!

So what was different here? Maybe I was just repeating what I had heard, and wanted to impress my girlfriend, but insight is not like that. Many people who have experienced it will tell you the same – it comes to you in a flash, and stays with you always.

As I stood on the pavement, it was as if my mind had been asleep for a long time, and suddenly starting working again of its own accord. It felt like the wheels had started moving, and now there was no turning back.

Waking up

My girlfriend had been a vegetarian for ten years when I met her, and I was a confirmed meat eater. I didn't know any different, and I kept eating meat for nearly a year after I met her. She never tried to convert me; and in fact, when I told her about stopping eating meat, she said “Oh no, you're not becoming a vegetarian are you?”

I remember the day I decided to stop. It was whilst we were working in a little pub in the english countryside, busy preparing the roasts for the sunday lunch. As I was cutting through the beef, the blood was pouring out all over the work surface, and suddenly I couldn't help thinking “This used to be an animal, this lump of flesh. An animal who walked the earth just as I do now;” and here was I cutting up the remains of its body, with my hands soaked in its blood. I couldn't believe I was standing there with a knife in my hand sprinkling herbs onto its remains!

In that instant, I decided to stop eating meat.

I have never touched it since, and it amazes me to still see people eating it greedily at the table, tearing it apart and dipping it in a nice sauce. That is the power of insight.

I then tried to convince people it was wrong – that Man shouldn't eat meat, and I got angry about the whole thing every time friends who weren't vegetarian came round. After a while, I think they stopped looking forward to coming round for dinner! The more I looked around me, the more insight I got into the nature of the world, and how they were connected. Always in a flash. Never thought about, mulled over, or explained.

But soon, I realised something important. Here was I, someone who had gained some insight into the

world as it is, trying to convince people of things about which they had no insight into. To them, I just seemed like a bit of a nut; an extremist, or just an annoyance. Why couldn't I just get on with life instead of trying to convince them of things? And then I saw it. These people were me, several years ago. If someone had tried to tell me that eating meat was not compassionate and loving, I would have laughed, or said something like, "piss off and leave me alone," thinking "What a nut!"

Do you understand? Insight cannot be taught or passed on. It only exists in the person who has it. To everyone who is asleep, it just seems like crazy talk. It has taken me until right now to realise this; now I can understand why everyone thought I was annoying, or mad, or maybe both. We humans do not like to be told what to do, or why things are right or wrong, we want to make our own minds up about things.

Unfortunately, without real insight, all our opinions are just based on our conditioning, and our learning – what our parents, our tradition, our religious leaders have told us. We don't want to hear about people who have "found another way," or even "found god," if we don't believe in it ourselves or haven't experienced it.

A religious experience?

There is one thing true of all drug and alcohol addicts, and that is, they like their "stuff." They go out of their way to make sure they get a regular supply of it at all times, whatever the cost to their relationships and health. Some people carry on like this their whole lives, whereas some go into therapy, and detox and struggle to stay clean. But the people I want to discuss with you here are those who magically found god, and stopped taking drugs or drowning themselves in liquor every night. We have to go into this carefully together, so we will take our time.

In the stories that have been related to me, or from personal accounts, people either saw a beam of light, or a flash of light, which they immediately attribute to god; so why don't we ask him about it, maybe he can help us solve it!

Me: Hi god. Sorry, I don't know what else to call you. What's with these religious experiences where people suddenly see the error of their ways. Have they found you?

God: Who am I?

Me: You are god, the all powerful, the creator of all things.

God: You say.

Me: Well... Anyway, are you the flash of light that people see when they get this insight into themselves?

God: Why do you think they see me?

Me: Because they say that they see you.

God: Who am I?

Me: Sorry, I don't quite get it. You are you.

God: Exactly.

Me: But that doesn't answer my question. I want to know if people are having a religious experience when they see the light.

God: They can call it whatever they want to.

Me: But is there a light?

God: I don't know, I can't see into their minds.

Me: But you are god.

God: So you keep saying.

Me: Ok, I give up. People say they have an experience, which they attribute to you, but you are saying that it has nothing to do with you. That it is in their mind.

God: I didn't say that. What I said was, people will see whatever they want to see, and they may attribute it to god, but if that is what it takes for them to see the path, then so be it.

Me: So it is a religious experience?

God: Your words, not mine.

Me: Ok, so they get a flash of insight into themselves, they wake up and start to lead a good life, they cannot believe it came from themselves, so they attribute it to god, who after all cannot be questioned on this, because god is a supernatural being, or at the very least, invisible, and because

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

it is attributed to god, no one questions it.

God: I couldn't have put it better myself.

Me: So there is no such thing as a religious experience?

God: There is the experience, which may feel like something they have never felt before, and because they have no words to describe it, they call it god, but they could call it anything they like, and they will still have the experience.

Me: Ok. One more question. What is it that gives them the insight. Is it you, or is it themselves?

God: Who am I?

Me: Well you are the whole, the universe. I remember from the last chat we had. So although the universe had a hand in it, it was them who did it themselves, because they are part of the whole.

God: Almost.

Me: Then what is left to say?

God: Be careful about saying the universe had a hand in it, because that implies some grand design, where there is nothing but the whole. People wake up because they wish to be woken. Their minds have now opened to the universe. They can see clearly.

Me: Yes, I have experienced that, but I wouldn't have attributed it to you.

God: Why would you, I don't exist.

Me: Don't you? Then how am I talking to you?

God: Exactly!

Was god helpful? I'm not sure. Was I really talking to god, or was I answering the questions? All I know is that we must find the flash of light we call insight, and pin it down once and for all.

I think we can safely say that insight has nothing to do with thought as we know it. If it did, we would all be able to see clearly, and the world would be in harmony, which is clearly not the case!

Thought is the result of memory, but insight is something new, do you see? Insight is something that can't be pinned down because it is not a process of the mind, but something else – not something religious; but if you want to call the whole, the everything, the universal, religious, then go ahead.

The experience that makes people change their lives, and embark on journeys that are so far removed from anything they have done before, requires so much energy to enable such a change in direction (that has nothing to do with thought), that maybe that burst of energy is the flash of light some people see.

Sometimes people change. They change towns, careers, and partners, but those are all in the realm of thought and memory, there is nothing new. So what makes a man want to give up the life he knows and dedicate it to explore the universe and himself to find out the nature of all things?

What made a selfish man, who spent his time wasting money and getting drunk, embark on a journey that has culminated in writing this book? A thought? A religious experience? Faith in god? I'll tell you. A flash so bright it shook my very being: A flash that caused such disruption in my brain cells that they were physically altered for ever. Who did this? God (as god would say, if you want to attribute it to me, go ahead!), or was it me, or the universal consciousness, if there is such a thing; or was it the whole, the indivisible?

Unfortunately, for the first time since I started this book, I cannot answer my own question. I cannot find out what this flash is in this short discussion; so maybe insight is the eternal, maybe it is the one thing that cannot be described, which cannot be labelled. Maybe god is the label we give to insight. All I know is that insight is a wonderful gift, wherever it comes from. And it can be awoken in everyone.

[Back to Index](#)

Insurance

1. *The act or an instance of insuring*
2. *A sum paid out as compensation for some theft, damage, loss etc.*
3. *A sum paid out*

I don't know if you have ever crashed your car, or lost something valuable to you, or had a house fire, a flood, or had something stolen? If you have, you will know it costs a lot of money to replace the items, and as most of us don't have bucket loads of spare cash, we would find ourselves in a bit of a predicament. That's where insurance comes in.

I don't know when it started, but we can assume it had something to do with wealthy people wanting to protect their property, or goods, but you can see the sense in taking it out, after all, insurance takes the “what if?” and “if only,” out of life, even if we are only talking about possessions.

I did not have insurance on my list of topics to write until several weeks ago, a time when I was in the final stages of editing the book.

I had gone on a two week holiday to greece (my first proper holiday for many years), and it was during this time, I realised I had missed an important topic. Let me explain why.

I woke up in the morning with a slight pain in my abdominal area, nothing severe, but nonetheless, uncomfortable. Having had food poisoning abroad on many occasions, I put it down to a dodgy meal the night before, or ice cubes in the water. I got some herbal tablets from the pharmacist, and he told me to take these three times a day, and if it didn't clear up, I should go to the doctor.

Four days later, and it was still there, so I headed down to the local doctor's surgery.

“If you can just fill in this form please, and write down the details of your travel insurance.”

“Ah, but I don't have any travel insurance,” I replied, now starting to worry I wouldn't have enough money for treatment.

“No travel insurance...?”

“Err, no, how much will it be?”

“Eighty euros.”

“Oh, I see.”

I couldn't believe I hadn't taken out travel insurance. I guess that because I have been travelling regularly for the past nine years, I had become a little, should we say, blasé about the whole thing. You see, I only considered travel insurance as important if you were carrying a lot of money, or possessions with you, and thought they might get stolen, I never for one moment thought about a medical emergency!

I dutifully handed over the cash, and was informed that I probably had a urinary infection, and was sent off with the usual prescription for antibiotics.

At the pharmacy, the pharmacist told me:

“Remember to keep your receipts, you will be able to claim this back on your travel insurance.”

“I don't have travel insurance,” I replied, chastising myself for not having ticked the box which said, “Would you like travel insurance?”

I handed over the cash, and started taking my tablets, twice a day, after meals.

One week passed and I still had pain, so I went back to the doctors.

“Yes, I see,” said the doctor, “the tablets prescribed are probably not strong enough for you. I will write you another prescription.”

I handed over more cash, went back to the pharmacy, handed over more cash, and started taking my tablets, twice a day, after meals.

The next morning, about 5.00 am, I was awoken with a strange pain in my left side. I thought it must be trapped wind, so I sat on the toilet for about fifteen minutes, trying to let it pass, but the pain just intensified. I went out to the balcony, and started to pace up and down, just to relieve the pain, but it didn't help. Within 30 minutes, I was in agony; I couldn't work out what was causing this pain. I went into the shower and just stood with hot water running over my lower back. It gave me slight relief, but as soon as I came out, I felt sick, and disorientated. At this point I started to worry, thinking: “I'm going to have to phone a doctor if this gets any worse.”

And it did get worse.

I phoned for an emergency doctor, and although I was in a great deal of pain, couldn't help thinking how much his bill might be for coming out to a hotel room at 6.00 am.

He eventually arrived, prodded me for about a minute, and finally said:

“Kidney stone.”

“Kidney stone? How?”

“Oh, there are many causes. I will give you this pain relieving injection, then you should take a taxi up to the private hospital, and see a specialist. Make sure you keep your receipts and then you can reclaim it from your insurance company.”

“I, erm, don't have travel insurance, what should I do?”

“Go to the public hospital and wait.”

Fortunately, he didn't want any money upfront.

I couldn't stand going on the bus, so I booked a taxi, which cost another 45 euros.

I waited and waited at the public hospital, at which (being a european citizen), I could get free treatment. I may have still been in some pain, but I was glad I was in a european country, and not somewhere where treatment would have cost me my life savings – if I had any!

After what seemed like days, I was finally seen by a nice doctor who did an ultrasound, and confirmed, that yes, I did have a small kidney stone. I should take these pain killers, and go and see my doctor when I got back home.

I took the prescription to the pharmacy, handed over some more cash, and started taking the tablets, three times a day, after meals, and took a taxi back to the hotel.

I returned to the uk the next day, about 350 euros lighter than I expected to be, but glad not to be in pain.

So what's the lesson here? Is there one? Do I only have myself to blame for not taking out travel insurance, or is there something more fundamental going on we should be looking at?

Compatibility test: Insurance vs. Compassion

If only I had taken out insurance, I would have saved myself all of that stress, wouldn't I? If I had just paid the very reasonable sum they were asking when I booked my holiday, I wouldn't have had to worry about going to a private hospital. In fact, I may have gone to the doctor earlier instead of trying to save money by buying the cheap tablets from the pharmacy.

But let's look at this from a different angle, shall we? It seems that these days, we need two things in life – the first being money, and the second, being insurance, but the people who are worst off have neither, so if anything goes wrong for them, they just have to deal with it! There is no one there on the end of the freephone number to say:

“Certainly, mr orr, we'll get your house all fixed up after that flood, and in the meantime, please book yourself into a nice hotel, and we'll pick up the tab.”

No, unfortunately, you're on your own. If you have lost everything, that's your tough luck. You should have studied harder at school, so you could get a better job, so you could pay the very reasonable sum for insuring your house. But no, you chose to miss classes at school, and tried to be cool, by not doing your homework, and the consequences of that, are that you now have a flooded house, ruined possessions, and nowhere to live. Deal with it.

That's not very compassionate, is it? But then, that's how life is these days. You see, every man is an individual, and individuals have to make sure they look out for number one, after all, no one else is going to, are they?

It seems to me we have lost an important part of being human, and that is to help people who are in need, and not ask for anything in return. Sure, we may see appeals on television for some major disaster and get our credit card out, but that's about it. We don't actually want to physically help people, especially in our own country. We seem to think we can only help people who are in an undeveloped country, where we say, “Poor wretches., look at them,” and magnanimously pick up the phone and say: “yeah... card number 4453 3221 1321 1321. Yeah... 50 dollars to the people who just had that earthquake.... Sure.... Ok... Thank you... Bye..”

And that's it done. You have shown your compassion, and you return to watching tv, and sipping your tea. But what if, the next day, your neighbour had a fire? Would you get your credit card out to help him? I seriously doubt it.

You would say: “I hope he's got plenty of insurance,” and return to watching tv, and sipping your tea. If you heard that, in fact, he had no insurance, would you be compassionate, or would you say: “He's only got himself to blame. Everyone knows you need to take out insurance.”

That's incredible, isn't it? One day helping out people in some faraway country whom you will never meet, and the next day, ignoring your neighbour, who really needs some help.

Why do you think that is? What is it about the modern society we have created, in which we will help people 3,000 miles away, but not someone who lives in the same street? Maybe, it is because we think the people in the faraway country can't help themselves, but know that our neighbour only had to pick up the phone to arrange insurance.

"You've only got yourself to blame," you tell him.

"Yeah, thanks for your compassion," he replies.

You see, I think insurance takes the compassion out of being human, the feeling that one wants to help their fellow Man, in his time of suffering, and replaces it with a policy number. To me, this is just another good example of how far we have come down the road of individualism, compartmentalism, and meism! No longer do we have a community, where we know everyone, and will help people if they need it, now, neighbourly compassion has been replaced with a corporate customer services centre.

We are so wrapped up in "me," that we fail to notice that anyone else exists, unless we happen to catch some emergency relief appeal on the television, which sparks a tiny part of humanity in us (or gives us an opportunity for some guilt relief).

Compassion is about recognising suffering, and wanting to do something about it. Insurance is also about recognising suffering, and wanting to do something about it. But only one is money free, and comes to the aid of his fellow Man, just because he can, not because he is a customer.

Prepare for death! Insure yourself!

Insuring your property, your possessions, and your health, are not the only policies available. Oh, no! There are so many more to choose from. But the one I want to talk to you about first is life insurance, where you pay money into a policy for many years, and when you die, it pays out! Surely, this is a joke, right?

"No, it's no joke," says one of you. "My husband died last year, leaving us with no income, and no way to pay the mortgage. If only he had taken out life insurance, we would have been able to have a happy life. As it is, we will have to sell our house, and move to a tiny apartment."

So I would say that the man who dies, leaving his wife and family to pay bills, without having taken out life insurance is a *very* selfish man! How dare he die, and leave the family with nothing?

But seriously, I can see the point of life insurance if you are able to cash your cheque at the "bank of the afterlife," but if that's not possible, I don't think I'll bother. You see, when I die, I die. That is the end for me.

"But what about your family? That's a very selfish attitude to have!" I hear some of you say

Unfortunately, it does sound like a good idea. And that's the problem with insurance. On the face of it, it does seem sensible to prepare for the unexpected, to take the "what if" out of living. So we sign up in our droves, knowing that once we have our policy in place, life can throw its worst at us, and we will be prepared! Because, you see, you must *always* plan for the unexpected. You never know when something bad will happen to you!

Talking of dying...

When I used to live in australia, there were always adverts on television for funeral insurance. Funeral insurance?! I couldn't believe it. And they also made you feel as though you were being selfish, if you didn't have a funeral plan.

(sad music playing, images of people crying)

"What would your family do if you died unexpectedly? Did you know it can cost up to five thousand dollars for a simple funeral? Five hundred for a priest. One thousand for a casket. Three hundred for flowers.... For only two dollars ninety a week, you can insure..."

I was seriously sickened by this. I couldn't believe that the insurance companies were praying on people's worst fears – not just the fear of death, but the fear of being a financial burden on your family!

In life, we now always assume the worst, and so we insure against it. We now *expect* that things will go wrong (sorry, but where did all this negativity come from?).

Are we so scared of living that we have to prepare for something "bad" happening to us? Yes, it may be unpleasant if there is a fire in your house. Yes, it may be unpleasant if you have your possessions stolen. Yes,

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

it may be unpleasant if you crash your car. But surely, the very act of insuring these items makes the fear of loss greater. You may think it's the opposite, but you see, if you have insurance, it must mean that you are afraid to lose these things, that you are psychologically attached to them.

You may think this is a stupid topic, and that “everybody knows it's sensible to have insurance,” and that actually, I don't know what I'm talking about, but let me ask you one question: Do the animals and the birds need insurance?

Does a bird take out insurance just in case his nest gets destroyed in a storm?

Does a squirrel take out insurance just in case someone steals his nuts!?

Can you see the point I am trying to make? If no other species on earth has insurance, then why does Man need it? I will let your over-active mind give you the answer.

“Because, what if a storm comes, and my house is destroyed, it would be terrible, I would lose everything, then what would I do? It would be terrible, I would lose...”

As usual, the whole thing comes down to Man's best friend, money.

You see, the bird doesn't need any money to build a new nest, as the materials are free; and the squirrel doesn't need any money to get more nuts, as nuts are free, the only person who needs money is Man, as he is the only species that has to pay for food and shelter. Maybe we will all start having to look at our lives more closely to find the real reason we need insurance.

[Back to Index](#)

J

Jealousy

1. *Showing extreme cupidity; painfully desirous of another's advantages*
2. *Suspicious or unduly suspicious or fearful of being displaced by a rival*
3. *A feeling of jealous envy (especially of a rival)*

We've all felt jealous at some point, haven't we? It's a natural human emotion they say.

“Why has she got him, she doesn't deserve him, she's nothing. Look at her, she looks cheap, he'd be so much better off with me.”

“Why did he get promoted, he's useless, he doesn't know his job. I taught him everything he knows, none of the staff will respect him.”

“Why were you talking to that woman again, is there something going on between you? She's a bitch that woman, I hate her.”

Wow! Can you feel that? Have you ever felt like that, maybe without even knowing you are doing it? Do you know what it feels like to me? Pure poison (anything that harms or destroys). Wanting something so much you feel hatred towards the other person for possessing it.

People who are jealous would rarely admit it, even to their closest friends. They would much rather seethe with anger inside. Why? Because to tell someone “they are ugly, don't deserve a man like that, and have terrible taste in clothes” wouldn't look good, would it? We may want what they have, but we would never let others know it. We all want to keep up the appearance we are happy for them, although we may make snide comments under our breath.

Deep down, we know that jealousy is a poisonous feeling. We don't want it, but we just can't help it. We also feel jealous when our partner talks to someone who we believe is more successful than us, has more money, or who looks more beautiful than us, and we believe our partner may be enticed away and we will be on our own. The more we feel jealous, the more angry we get, and given enough time this may actually lead to physical violence.

Do you not think this is a terrible emotion to have? To feel such anger towards someone; not because of something they have done, but because of something they have that you want (beauty/possessions). Unfortunately, it seems to exist in every one of us. It is not a disease, so why do so many of us have it?

Self-esteem

1. *A feeling of pride in yourself*

It starts with a feeling we are inadequate, and we begin to resent other people's success. We want the powerful job, the fast car, the gorgeous husband and the worse we feel about ourselves the more insatiable the desire becomes. Only through seeing ourselves as worthy can we cure ourselves. The problem starts with one word: Comparing (*examining resemblances or differences*). We compare ourselves to everyone. We compare our waist sizes, our clothes, our cars, our girlfriends, and our wallets.

Situation: Walking around a supermarket.

Thought: “Why is he looking at her, does he think she's more attractive than me?”

Action: “I saw you! You're always looking at other women! She's nothing but a cheap tart, I can't believe you prefer her over me.”

Result: Argument with boyfriend/husband. Resentment building on both sides. The man can't believe that the girlfriend/wife is jealous over something he wasn't even really aware of, and the woman begins to wonder if he can be trusted, especially if he's out on his own.

If she were uglier, fatter or wore more unattractive clothes than you, you wouldn't care, would you? No one has ever been jealous of someone with an older car or a worse job. The only time the jealousy monster rears its head is if someone is wealthier than you, or more attractive than you. Jealousy doesn't care if the person with the large diamond necklace is a horrible person, and you are caring and nice. It only cares about the possessions.

But this only happens when you feel low; when you feel bad about yourself, or you are unhappy with your lot in life, and you feel as though you deserve better. It takes advantage of the fact that you are not feeling positive about your own qualities and offers a solution. “Why has she got it and you haven't, you deserve it more than she does.” So you agree with the thought, “Yes I do, I am better than her, I should be wearing the diamond necklace.”

If you were happy with yourself, satisfied with, what are in fact, only temporary possessions. If you weren't constantly wanting to be someone else, but content to just be you, comparison would not begin. Why would you compare yourself to someone who had a diamond necklace and expensive clothes if you never had a desire to possess them?

Greed

1. *Excessive desire to acquire or possess more (especially more material wealth) than one needs or deserves*

For many thousands of years now, humans have been attempting to acquire more and more wealth; and for some people, it is never enough. Look at the possessions of kings and queens. They had huge wealth, but wanted more; and even now, in the twenty first century, the acquisition of material wealth is number one on our priority list – but as usual, we would never admit it.

Imagine this scenario. You and your neighbour both have a similar size house, earn equivalent salaries, and drive similar cars, but one day your neighbour comes home with a brand new ferrari. How do you feel? For some time now you have been on an equal par, but now he has upped the stakes by buying a sports car. Can you say that you're not just a little bit envious?

Now Imagine this scenario. You meet a friend in the street, you talk for a moment and she tells you she has to go because her husband is taking her to the new five star hotel for the weekend. Why doesn't your husband take you there? He never takes you to nice places like that. How do you feel? Even the slightest bit jealous? Of course you do. Where comparison meets greed, jealousy and envy arise.

To find out why we are greedy, we have to go into this a bit more deeply. When we have food, clothing and shelter we have enough to survive. When we have someone to share our life with and bring children up with, we have all that is necessary for the survival of the species. But being human is not just about surviving, is it? If we all just “survived” and were happy with that, there would be no trouble in the world, but somehow our minds have become sick and we make ourselves better by gaining more than the next man, our nearest rival.

Make no mistakes about it, greed is not a “sin,” it is a sickness of the mind. Somewhere along the line we have realised we can have more than we possibly could ever need. We have become hoarders, and we want more and more items. Seeing as we can't take them with us when we die why do you think this is important to us?

It seems pervasive throughout societies worldwide rich and poor. The poor man wants to become rich and the rich man wants to become richer.

Biologically, greed is a meaningless pursuit. There is only so much we can eat and drink, but psychologically is where greed is limitless. Somehow wires have become crossed, and the brain thinks it should have more and more, and let's face it, the more we have, the more secure we feel. The more we have, the less fear we feel.

Rich people always look so much more relaxed, wouldn't you say? They don't have to worry about a thing. They can always buy more of what they desire, whereas the poor man is always struggling and striving to make enough money to buy what he needs, let alone desires; but the feeling is still there. In the back of his mind, the poor man wants more. He desires to become rich and sometimes will stop at nothing to get what he wants. Robbing banks is just one example of this.

The poor man desires what the rich man has, and because he does not know how to get it by working, plans to steal it instead. He envies the rich man's lifestyle, his car, his house, his glamorous wife, and thinks that if only he could get enough money he would be happy.

I have never robbed a bank, but I have borrowed and run up credit card bills – all because I was greedy, and wanted more than I had. It was only in the last couple of years that instead of acquiring items, I have been getting rid of them. I suddenly realised that by having enough to eat, warm clothing and a simple place to sleep, I had enough personal items. The rest are just a burden.

The more we acquire, the more we need to protect it, in case someone else tries to steal it. So we buy locks for our houses, alarms for our cars and use banks to keep our money in. We fail to see the connection between our greed for more and the man who wants more but has no means to earn it.

We pour scorn on those who steal from us – we label them, and we lock them up. “Criminals!” we say: “Why don't they get jobs and earn it for themselves, instead of stealing from us? We who have worked so hard to get all this stuff!”

But don't you see? The thief and the rich man both the same; they are both engaged in greed, but they think they are different. The only difference is that the rich man has gone to work for it (maybe exploiting

people, harming the environment and stepping on anyone who gets in his way), whereas the thief decides to take the, shall we say, more direct route! But as he routinely engages in violence to get what he wants, he is singled out, and put behind bars. It doesn't matter what harm the businessman has done to others or the planet, because he followed the law – and that is all that is important.

In our western societies, we have been taught that greed is good. Greed is to be encouraged, and the developing countries are catching up fast. Yet they fail to see that the benefits of greed – although material – rest firmly in the mind. “I am happy for now” your mind says: “We've got lots of nice things, but how about us going out and getting some more?” It's no wonder people start to feel jealous. If the educators and the government tell you greed is good, then why shouldn't you have it! It's your right.

So how do we transcend this sickness if there is no magic pill for it?

How much is really enough?

We are all engaged in status battles with our peers, that is clear. Individuals, husbands and wives try harder and harder to impress their friends and family with how well they are doing. It is a measure of themselves you see, it is who they are. It is their self-esteem. It is everything. The sports car, the gold and diamond jewellery, the attractive partner, the large house, the privately educated children, the holiday home abroad, all represent the sum total of these people. All made possible through greed, supported by the powerful (greed keeps the economy ticking over nicely you see, and a strong economy means re-election).

But suppose I wake up one morning and decide that enough is enough. I begin to understand that greed is keeping me trapped in an endless battle to earn more money with no end in sight, so I give everything of value away. I buy a small house, give up my car, start to grow my own vegetables, try to live as simply as possible and take a job working for the benefit of all, in a way that does not harm humans, animals, or the planet etc. What happens to my status in the community?

Well it's quite clear. They probably think I've had a nervous breakdown! My partner will probably not want to be with me anymore because they were used to showing off their riches, to show how much wealthier they were than their friends. My children will hate me because they can no longer have the latest game consoles or mp3 players, so they also can no longer show off to their friends either. Your friends and family will not understand why, after working so long and so hard for something, that you could give it up, but what has this shown you? What have you learnt from this experience?

What you have learned, I believe, is a great deal about other people. You can see why they like you, and why they respect you. It is not as you believed, “because you are a really nice guy,” it's because of what you have in material possessions, that's all. Soon, your fancy friends will stop phoning you because you have become an embarrassment to them at parties, your wife will file for divorce, and your kids will probably prefer to live with mum's new boyfriend who drives a sports car like you had and has even more money than you used to have!

What does this really teach us about others? What can we see straight away, now we have nothing but the basics necessary for living? Think about this carefully for a moment, for it is of the utmost importance.

You have stripped your life down to the absolute minimum of bolt-ons, but you are still you. You are no different. You are still attractive, you still have your humour, your personality, but others don't care about that. They are only interested in the bolt-ons, the status and the possessions; what you can physically give them. It is sad to note that this is pervasive throughout our modern society. “How can I be with him now he has nothing, what will people think of me?”

We just can't stop comparing. We never once stop to think that it is us who are empty, our minds sick with greed and envy, desiring more and more, whilst the man who has transcended greed through choice and personal action has no need to feel jealous of anyone anymore. Do you see? He had everything, and now he has given it up to live as himself. The only reason we become jealous is because we want what someone else has. If you no longer want it, because you see the damage that jealousy is doing to your mind, then you are free.

Watch yourself closely

As I have said in other topics, I have spent the last few years unburdening my life. That does not mean I do not appreciate nice furniture, or the skill and design that has gone into a sports car, or the beauty of a diamond necklace; I just do not see the need to possess them. For me, the most important thing in life is to live well, to be kind to my friends, family, and strangers, and to learn about myself and others. I like to laugh; I like to play; I like to discuss, and I like to read. Above all, I never take life too seriously.

The more we start to possess, the more we have to be serious, the more work we have to do, the more people we hurt along the way. I cannot urge you to stop being greedy, for it is inherent in society. I cannot urge you to stop being jealous. But recognise that jealousy is not in your nature, and neither is greed. These are all learned behaviours which can be unlearned. Do not ask yourself “why am I jealous?” or “why am I greedy?” You just are.

Acceptance is the first step to unlearning. The next step is awareness of yourself in action.

Just watch yourself closely until you catch yourself saying “Why does he earn more money than me...” or “I wish my partner would buy me a necklace like that...” or “Why isn't my husband as good looking as that man, I wish I could swap.” The moment you catch yourself in action is the moment you will wake up.

When you see the beauty of life in all its simplicity, you will be free, and you will know that time. One morning when you wake up, life will just seem different. The material things you used to place importance on will no longer be important. Having more money, being jealous of your wealthy friend with his beautiful wife, or envious of your neighbour's sports car, will all seem like a dream.

[Back to Index](#)

Jobs 1

1. *The principal activity in your life that you do to earn money*
2. *The responsibility to do something*

This is the big one, the one you spend most of your life doing. Something you do at least five days a week and spend eight hours a day at; so you better enjoy it, right? You've finished school, you took your exams, passed or failed. Now what? Depending on your results and what you're interested in, you may find yourself as a trainee barrister, trainee engineer, trainee accountant, trainee doctor, or you may find yourself with the rest of us, not knowing what to do. The only thing you're sure about is you know you are supposed to get a job to earn money, to pay your bills, to contribute to society. Welcome to adult life.

You may be 16, 18 or 21, depending on when you left school, but this is all new, this responsibility. It only seems like yesterday when you were playing in the school yard, laughing with friends, learning about life, growing up, experimenting. Suddenly, it's all gone, that life, and you are now on your own.

What does that mean to you as a young person? What are you expected to do? What is your role in life supposed to be? Who are you? Well, the one thing you are, is a fully fledged adult (according to law) and as such, you will be welcomed with new temptations, such as alcohol to make the pain of adult life more bearable, and cigarettes to help relieve the daily stress. As long as it's legal, nobody cares – your parents won't, and the government certainly won't. You are now old enough to make your own choices.

In some countries, alcohol and cigarettes are not legal until you are 18 or 21, but you are usually still old enough to work and pay taxes as an adult at 16. It's all a bit strange all this. One day you were a schoolboy, and the next, you are an adult. It's not like driving, you don't get L plates to wear round your neck for the first two years. You're straight in, no allowances. Oh, and by the way, you are also now old enough to get shot for your country.

There are so many choices, so many types of jobs. Factory jobs, catering jobs, management jobs, administration jobs, carpentry jobs, retail jobs, sales jobs, even self-employed jobs. There is a huge choice – for some. For others, it's more difficult. They didn't pass their exams, or they live in a town where employment is scarce, and they have to take the first thing that comes up. One thing's for sure though, the only reason you're taking a job is because you need the money. Just imagine for a moment that you win the lottery. You have just won millions of dollars!

“Congratulations! What will you do now?” the interviewer asks.

“Well, I'm going to take my whole family on holiday, buy a new car, and move house. I will give some away to charity, and I'm going to pay off the mortgage on my brother's house.”

“That's very nice of you,” says the interviewer. “Do you think you'll go back to work on monday?”

“Sure, just to pick up my things and tell them I'm not coming back.”

Is earning money my main purpose in life?

Everything costs money – even the basics like food, water, shelter, heat and clothing. There is nothing for free. Even if you want to grow your own vegetables, you have to have rent or buy land to grow them on. Everything costs something.

Although you may be able to barter for some goods, large electricity, telephone and mortgage companies aren't interested in what services you can offer them in exchange, they want paid in hard currency, (the paper medium of exchange that is currently used.) and there's only one way to get it – hard work.

When you're still at school, you don't have to think about this. Your parents provide all the basic necessities for you and more. Children aren't really aware of how things appear at the table, or how a new toy came to be in their possession, they just arrive, and that's a child's prerogative. It's when you stop being a child that the realisation comes as to how you get all the things you want. Work. W-O-R-K.

How many people can honestly say they like going to work? I know some, but most people would prefer to do be doing something else, doing something more constructive with their time. As one person I know put it: “Work gets in the way of things you love doing like your hobbies, or spending time with your family.”

We don't want to spend time with people we don't know and may not like, doing a job we don't really like, eight hours a day, five days a week. We certainly wouldn't spend that time on a hobby we didn't like or spend eight hours a day with friends we didn't like! So either some of us actually do like our jobs, or we're doing it just for the money.

Some people have fulfilling jobs don't they? They find them fulfilling because they are actually getting

paid for something they enjoy doing, and there is no specific job that fits this description, everybody's idea of fulfilling work is different.

I worked in information technology for several years. I started at the bottom, and through a good bit of luck rather than design, managed to work my way up to several managerial positions. I jumped around from contract to contract, always earning a good bit more than before, and the work was interesting – all big projects to put in new systems, never a dull moment.

I really enjoyed my time doing it, but looking back, I asked myself would I have chosen information technology as my career if the money hadn't been so good, as I certainly could never see myself going back to that life now; I would find it immensely boring and unstimulating. So I asked myself: "what would you have done instead?" But I couldn't answer. I just fell into information technology; it wasn't the thing I really liked, it just paid the bills, and as a side effect, was actually quite interesting.

When you start a job, you may hate it straight away, but as time goes on, you start to enjoy going. You meet different people, complain about the bosses, have lunch together, go for a smoke together, maybe a drink after work. It's almost like an extended family.

Work also gives you a reason for getting up in the morning, seeing as the days of hunting and gathering have long since passed. You may complain about hating your job, but the regularity of the income, and the things money provides, gives you a gentle reminder that although you don't like the work, it sure is better than sitting around the house with no money; because although everyone says they'd rather be at home doing their hobbies, or playing with their children, what they omit to tell you is, "as long as I had enough money."

As I well know, sitting at home when you're poor is a miserable experience, especially when you start seeing the bills coming in every day and you have no way of paying them. Believe me, spending time with your family or enjoying your hobbies isn't so much fun anymore when you know you may be evicted from your home. They take a back seat until you find regular work again, and once your back on your feet financially, you can start complaining about work, and wishing you were at home with your family, enjoying your hobbies.

Although everyone would like to be doing what they love, one thing stops them – money; or rather, the lack of it. If you think life's difficult with money, try life without it. Although some people manage ok.

Monks spend their time in quiet contemplation in their monasteries, and generally never carry money, proving you don't need worldly possessions – but remember, someone's paying for their food, the upkeep of the monastery, the purchase of the land, and their shoes. They may have no need for money, but that's because all of their expenses are picked up by their relevant religious institutions who get their money in turn from you, who has to go to work to earn it!

Money is critical to our existence now. We can't operate without it. We have discussed barter in another topic, but as you may remember an airline won't accept three sacks of potatoes from a farmer to pay for his holiday flights! And for good reason. What would they do if everyone was paying them in produce, plumbing services, massages and upholstery? Barter works at its best between two individuals who both require each other's services and can be effective, but let's get back to the topic at hand.

Whatever we do, we expect to be paid for it, whether in cash or as a barter agreement – that is called a job. We all need one. It is our responsibility as adults to have one, and without one we'd all be in a pretty sorry state. The question is, what job?

We have already discussed that even if we enjoy our work, the purpose of going every day is to earn money. Without earning this money, life on earth would be difficult for all of us, even to have the most basic existence. Throughout the world you have seen people without money, and they have to rely on other people to earn it for them, to be distributed through the government social welfare system or in extreme cases through international aid.

We need work to keep our self-esteem high, to feel worthwhile as a human being, so it is no wonder that people feel depressed when unemployed. Everyone needs to feel purpose in life, and there is no nobler purpose than going to work to earn money to feed and clothe your family, provide a roof over their heads and enjoy yourself once in a while. So whilst earning money may not be the meaning of life, it certainly is the purpose for which all adults go to work every day. No man can search for meaning when he's hungry.

Jobs 2

1. *The principal activity in your life that you do to earn money*
2. *The responsibility to do something*

As I travel around during the day, I take pleasure watching people engaged in their work, not because I like to see other people working instead of me, but to see the complex human, and what he is capable of physically, and mentally.

*Counting, adding, typing.
Designing, cutting, building.
Thinking, talking, deciding.
Lifting, packing, driving.*

We're amazing aren't we? Who could have thought we could have evolved into a being capable of such complex tasks? I don't think most of us realise how brilliant we are!

As I sit here typing, a thought comes almost instantaneously; my brain sends messages down the arms, to the fingers which have learned where each key is, and words automatically appear on a screen. The sheer complexity of making a wrist and finger move to a thought. That the word appears in my head and all my fingers move to type it is the most amazing thing. Think about it for a moment. Now think that a human has also designed the computer I am typing this into.

Most of us have no idea how the words get onto the screen, what a screen is made of, and how our work is saved to something called a hard disk. We just accept that it happens, the same as being able to type. But you try asking another species to type, or design a computer!

We are the most intelligent beings on the planet with superior intelligence, articulate speech, and erect carriage. We have created musical symphonies, built bridges, sent men into outer space, and built buildings in the sky where people can live. We have designed machines that can fly. We have designed systems where we can talk to people who live thousands of miles away. We can send moving images through the airwaves. We can see at night, thanks to electric light. We can keep food fresh for months by freezing it. We can keep warm at night without lighting fires thanks to central heating. Those are just a few examples of a list that could last pages and pages.

We have indeed achieved a lot, through our capacity for complex thought, thanks to our amazing bodies. That's why it makes me sad to see some humans engaged as machines. Human beings working in jobs that require them to use nothing more than their labour; jobs that require little, or no thought. Why? Because they need money, and they failed their exams at school. No human is born not to use their brain for eight to nine hours of the day; our brains have the capacity to do great things, even if we did fail our exams. Some people just aren't good at tests, or they've had a difficult upbringing, but the fact remains that as a human, you have a huge brain just waiting to be used.

Modern business is organised around larger-scale companies, with a hierarchy that has few bosses, and is bottom heavy with workers employed for their labour only – much like an army. With the advent of the modern production line (*mechanical system in a factory whereby an article is conveyed through sites at which successive operations are performed on it*) which facilitates fast construction of items, each employee is only required to do a small part (no craftsman is responsible for making the whole product). This requires skills which can be easily be learned with on the job training.

In the beginning, the work may seem difficult, but like driving a car, the more you do it, the easier it gets. It becomes a subconscious process, where you can think about other things when doing it. The modern office is organised in the same way, only pieces of paper are processed instead of products.

Business leaders, economists, and governments will always argue that a certain percentage of workers will always have manual machine-like jobs, and they are correct. You see, without humans engaged in this type of work, products wouldn't get made, companies wouldn't make money, employees wouldn't get paid, taxes wouldn't get paid, social services would collapse, (roads, education, health) and society as we know it, would collapse, leading to an eventual breakdown in law and order and eventually anarchy – and nobody wants that, do they?

So, although education is high on the governments list "Everyone has the right to an education," they don't want everyone "too" educated, as that would upset the fine balance that needs to be achieved. They still need to provide employment to people with low academic achievement so they can afford food, clothing, and

rent, and leave them with some money to spend on entertainment, otherwise they may find themselves with some very unhappy voters, who fail to return them to power at the next election! So the employers don't want everybody to be a deep thinker do they?

Imagine if you had gone to university for four years, were well educated, used creative thought and were put on a production line that required no thought? Actually, imagine a whole factory staffed by university professors! They wouldn't stay longer than a week, unless they were desperate, but even then, they would find it intolerable. They would argue with their supervisors that this "wasn't the best way to do it, and had they considered doing it another way?" Why? Because they were using their brains, something that is definitely not encouraged on a production line (or indeed the army). People must obey orders, they must conform, otherwise there would be chaos.

Companies may have "employee consultations" where they discuss proposals for changes, or ask for employee input; but in reality, the managers are the ones doing the thinking – that's what they get paid for. They get paid to think, and workers get paid to do. If you have too many ideas or disagree too much with the way that things are being done, you may find yourself labelled a "troublemaker," and be on the next list for redundancy. So in order to keep your job, it's better to just keep your mouth shut and not think too much.

I am not saying that everyone's jobs are on a production line, or in an office moving paper, that is merely a couple of examples. What I want to discuss, is jobs where you don't have to use that big brain of yours; where the tasks are so (relatively) easy for someone with this kind of brain capacity, that the job becomes monotonous, yet you can't leave, because you need the money.

How many of us are stuck in jobs where we can't use our brain, but have had to stay because we have taken a mortgage, bought a car, are raising a family, and have credit card debts? The sad thing is we just give up sometimes. Society tells us that this is our place. We failed our exams at school so we are destined for a lifetime of misery, doing a job that makes us no better than a machine. All for what? A bit of money?

We are here for such a short time on the planet that it seems such a shame to waste the brain we have. You and I are the same; you and the boss are the same; and if you're the boss reading this, you and the employees are all the same.

We all have brains of approximately the same capacity, it just depends on how much you use them. If you are told that because you failed your exams, you are written off as a human being. They couldn't be more wrong. Exams are just indicators of how much you remember of a subject, and if you weren't interested, didn't study, or were distracted by social or family problems, it's no wonder you didn't pass! It doesn't mean you're stupid, or don't have a brain. You just aren't using it.

So now, imagine you could do any job you wanted, what would it be?

Any job you wanted

Would it be the same job as you're doing now? I would guess that unless you were doing a job that used your brain and one that interested you, the answer would be no.

Job now: Cleaner

Job wanted: Cleaner

We all have what we call dreams. We have jobs we would like to do, no matter what field they are in, whether in science, arts, aerospace, or industry. These are the jobs, that given the chance, we would love to do.

Let me ask you a question. If there was a twenty year old factory worker whose job it was to sweep the floors, could he become an engineer? Could an office clerk become an airline pilot, or a cleaner a doctor? The answer depends on two things: First, on the length of time they have left their brain unused (a fifty year old man who has never used his brain may find it more difficult to learn something new), and second, how much the person really wants to do the job. If you really wanted to be a doctor, I mean really wanted to, you could. You only have to be deeply interested in it, and when you're that interested in something, you are prepared to do whatever it takes to learn it, no matter how long.

The trick is to not leave your brain ticking over in idle too long. Your brain is like a ferrari just waiting for

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

you to put your foot on the accelerator to show you what it can do. Your brain is the most powerful thing on the planet and maybe even the universe. Don't let society condition you into believing that you are not capable of magnificent things. You are not just a worker, you are amazing. You are a human being; you must not let anyone set your limits.

If companies want machines they should build them not use you. You are not a machine. The possibilities for work (which we have shown is necessary to earn money) are endless, although money should not be the only reason you go to work. Think now about the type of work you would like to do. It may seem outrageous to you that it could be possible, and your friends, colleagues, and family may also tell you that it's impossible.

“What? You, a doctor? Ha! Don't make me laugh”

People are always jealous of someone who wants to use their mind and isn't prepared to be labelled *worker*. They may want to do something different too, but were too embarrassed to mention it in case anyone laughed at them. Take the courage to learn more, to do the job you have always wanted to do; after all, the world will be a better place when more people start using their brains. Think about this for a moment. Can you see the possibilities?

The path you want is not always the easiest to navigate, but if you really want it, you will find a way, whether you have a mortgage, credit card debt or two children.

This is your one chance at life to do the thing you have always wanted to do. Take it. Don't spend nine hours a day wishing you were somewhere else. If you really want to, you can be somewhere else doing what you want to do and getting paid for it. You have nothing to lose.

[Back to Index](#)

Jobs 3

1. *The principal activity in your life that you do to earn money*
2. *The responsibility to do something*

I recently asked myself the question: “What work have you done to help the world be a better place today?” To be honest with you, I had to say, nothing. Sure, I have contributed to the world by being a cog in the wheel that lets people be fed, bridges be built, televisions be bought, houses be built and armies conquer nations. I have gone to work, earned enough money to pay my bills. I have paid taxes to the government for the benefit of society and had enough money left over to buy a few consumer goods, go on a couple of holidays and generally have a nice time.

Then I asked myself a second question: “Has any work you have ever done furthered the cause of humanity.” “What a deep question to ask yourself,” I thought! I racked my brain and could honestly say that nothing I had done in my life had furthered the cause of humanity. If you asked yourself the same two questions, what would your answer be?

It's a tough question, because although many people do good work every day, helping people and healing them, they would have great difficulty quantifying whether they were furthering the cause of humanity. So I think we need to re-phrase the questions don't you. How about:

“What work have I done to make the world a worse place today?”
“Has any work I have ever done worsened the cause of humanity?”

To most of us who work in regular jobs, we wouldn't think anything we were doing made the world a worse place, especially if the work we were doing was legal.

Legal

1. *Established by or founded upon law or official or accepted rules*

I'm sure the man who works packing cigarettes in the factory or the person delivering them to the stores, or the shop assistant selling them doesn't think they are making the world a worse place. It's not their fault if someone over the legal age for smoking dies of lung cancer, that's a personal choice. All they are doing is their job. What about the man who works in the gun factory. All he does is assemble one part of the item, he doesn't care if it's a real gun or a toy, he's just doing his job. He has to pay his bills too. The same goes for the man delivering them or the store that sells them. They don't kill people. They're just doing their job. He's not doing anything *illegal*.

If you were to ask the man in the gun factory why he does what he does, what do you think he'd say? I'd think he'd be annoyed he was being asked such a question!

“I've worked here twenty years. I've never had a sick day in my life. I pay my taxes and my bills on time, and I have brought up two children who are both law abiding and at university. I volunteer at my local hospital. I do not do anything wrong. I'm just a hard working citizen of this country who only has ten years left until retirement. Even if I wanted to, there's no point in me giving up my job, there's plenty of people willing to take it over. There isn't too much employment around here, so what would I do? I'd be unemployed, I wouldn't get my pension, and I'd have a tough life. No thanks. Until someone tells me the work I'm doing is *illegal*, I'll keep coming to work every day so I can keep paying my bills.”

Most of you would find it hard to find fault with what he's saying. After all, he does have a point. His aim is to find work to earn money which he does. Employment in his area is hard to come by, and anyway, he quite enjoys his job. He knows it's mundane, but he likes the people there, and he's doing a great service to the nation assembling guns for the army. He has achieved everything he set out to do. He would vehemently deny he is contributing to the death of thousands of people around the world, killed by the very weapon he helped assemble.

“I have never fired a gun in my life, I don't fight with anybody, and I am a peaceful man who is just going about his own business, and by the way, I don't make the bullets! That's what kills people, not guns.”

Like everybody in the world he has a family to feed and look after, but then again, so does the man who has just been killed by the gun he helped manufacture.

Would you do anything for money?

I'm not talking about selling drugs, or robbing banks. I'm talking about a job in a real company that makes or sells items that are legal. I do not wish to get into a discussion with you about morals and ethics. There is no such thing as right and wrong here, that is all a matter of personal opinion. I may think that the man selling cigarettes is helping people kill themselves, but he thinks he's providing a public service.

Cigarettes, weapons, and alcohol, are not the only businesses in the world *not* furthering the cause of humanity, but they certainly are responsible for more deaths than the agricultural trade spraying our crops with poisons, or the soft drink companies and fast food companies addicting our children; although they are catching up. At least you can see the result of an automatic machine gun having been fired, it's a lot harder to measure the health costs of the use pesticides and insecticides.

So would I do anything for money? No I wouldn't, but only because I am aware of the knock on effects of seemingly innocuous actions.

Think about this scenario for a moment. Who is to blame for the death of the man in who was robbed in the street; is it the man who fired the trigger? Or is it the government for legalising guns; or the woman who packed the bullets into the box; or the man who sold the gun; or the woman who works in the accounts department of the gun company who paid the supplier for the raw materials to make the gun; or the shareholder; or the computer company that provides their pc's; or the electricity company who keeps the production line running? Who is ultimately responsible? Legally only one. The man who fired the bullet.

"Quite right" says you, "he is the only man who broke the law. He is a murderer. He should face the death penalty. He is evil."

Wait a minute though. If no one had made the gun or sold the gun, he would have found it a lot more difficult to kill the man he was robbing. "But," says you, "he would have probably have used a knife if he hadn't had a gun..."

Nobody wants to take responsibility for the effects their jobs have on the world. The man who screws the wing onto the fighter aircraft, thinks he is no more responsible for the deaths of a thousand people who die in a bombing raid, than the man who types up advertising brochures for the cigarette company he works for. In their opinion, the only person responsible is the one who carries out the action; the person who smokes the cigarette, or who fires the gun. But we are all part of the chain when we work. We are all ultimately responsible.

Think about what you do, what company you work for, and what they do. If you don't know, find out. Is anything you or they do contributing to making the world a worse place?

Of course, if you work sweeping the floor at a fast food chain you wouldn't really care, it's just a job to pay the bills, but if we all think like that we will never be able to make the world a better place for ourselves. If we stop thinking about our own personal needs for a moment, and start to see the bigger picture, we will begin to understand that choosing work that is good for the world can only benefit us all in the long term. I am not talking about doing voluntary work.

As we discussed in part one, we need to earn money to survive in the modern society, it is the type of organisation we own or work for that is important. The way we can evaluate the impact our job is having on the world is by making a simple positive and negative comparison list:

Fast food company

Positive:

1. The fast food chain creates jobs for the local economy.
2. They provide cheap food quickly.

Negative:

1. Litter in the streets.
2. Huge volume of packaging used.
3. Addicting children and adults to unhealthy foods.
4. Helps make every high street look the same, forces out local restaurants who can't compete with such

cheap food.

5. Helping create a society that rushes eating, and doesn't respect the effort that goes in to cooking a meal.
6. Clearing of forests to graze cattle.
7. Waste of resources on something not beneficial to the system.

By doing this we can start to get a clear view in our mind of the negative sides to the company we run, or are employed by, thus enabling us to start a conversation with our employer about concerns we have, or more likely (due to not wishing to be sacked), leave the job and find one that fits in better with our personal ethics. The most important time to make this list though is before starting work for an employer. Most of us know the right questions to ask at an interview. "What is the salary? What are the career prospects, the health plan benefits, holidays..? But how many people have ever asked a prospective employer:

"What is the negative impact of your business on the world as a whole?"

It certainly isn't a question I have ever asked, have you? Why? Because we want the job. We want what it offers us. We want the package that enables us to have a comfortable lifestyle. We don't really want to jeopardise that by asking questions that might embarrass our future employer do we?

Interviewer: So do you have any other questions about our gun making business?

You: Well you've pretty much covered everything except... could you tell me what the negative impact of your business on the world is please?

Interviewer: Sorry, I don't follow.

You: Well, does the business impact anyone negatively?

Interviewer: No, we have a great employee loyalty scheme, we donate one percent of our profits to charities and help people in third world. We also give money to the local schools.

You: That's not quite what I meant. Does your business harm anyone else's lives in the world?

Interviewer: Well our guns kill people if that's what you mean, but our business has a social responsibility program. We recycle eighty percent our waste, we have solar power in the factory, we collect rainwater for use in production, and we have summer barbecues every year for disadvantaged children. Any other questions?

Please think about this carefully for a moment. This may sound like an extreme example, but it isn't. Either the people who work for, and run companies are aware of the harm their primary products do (and try to cover it by doing "good work" in the local community, as a smokescreen to their real activities), or nobody actually cares what they do to earn money.

What does your company do?

It may be that you sell clothes, not guns, but where are the fabrics made? Are they produced in some sweat shop where the people work twelve hour days, and earn less than you spend on a soft drink? Or do you sell cars or computers which use massive resources from the earth to manufacture? It's no good saying: "Well, if I don't do it someone else will" or "if people didn't want to buy the products they don't have to;" it really is *your* personal responsibility to do work, that not only gives you money to live and enjoy your life, but also does nothing to negatively impact someone else's life. Their life is as important as yours.

It may be that you ignore this section because it is a difficult one to come to terms with. What we are saying here is that by not engaging in employment that has a negative impact on the world (people or environment), the negative effect of that work will disappear. By doing work which positively impacts the world, we are contributing to making life better for everyone.

We are the most intelligent species on the planet, but sometimes it seems as though we are also the most stupid, selfish, arrogant, uncaring, cruel species on the planet. I'm sure there are no other species here that could be labelled as all those things.

Life isn't just about one person earning money, owning a house a car, and having a family and taking two

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

holidays a year. Life is about people. Six *billion* people and their right to enjoy a short life here whilst not being negatively impacted by other people on the planet.

It seems to me that most of us are only concerned with what we can get now – money, status, power, control. We don't care about anything else. We want to earn a lot of money to have a rich, easy life, and we don't care how we get it; and we sure don't care about what will happen to the planet in 200 years, we'll be long gone; it will be someone else's problem. Meanwhile, we're going to have a goodtime.

I hope I am not right? Am I?

[Back to Index](#)

K

Killing

1. *An event that causes someone to die*
2. *The act of terminating a life*

We all hear that “killing is wrong,” yet we all do it every day. “Not me,” says you, “I have never killed anything or anyone in my life, I am a lifelong vegan and do not eat or wear any animal products or by-products.”

I too do not knowingly eat any animal products, nor knowingly wear animal products, but that's not to say that I'm not a cold blooded killer!

The vegetarian cold blooded killer

I believe that all life is precious, and should be preserved, but a lion would disagree with me. For me it's a philosophical and ethical choice, for the lion, it's the choice between life and death (his). He has to eat meat, he has no method of processing, letting alone finding, potatoes and carrots! So my view on killing is instantly different from an animal who requires meat to stay alive.

One day we may all be vegetarians, and no one will have to put up with the gory sight of a predator tearing apart its prey; instead it will be the carrots being brutally torn from the soil using machines!

As a recent (seven years) vegetarian, I have often heard people using the argument:

“You say you don't eat meat, but how do you know that the vegetables aren't suffering, hmm, what about that, vegetarian?”

To which I have to reply: “You're right, I have no idea if the vegetables suffer, but until I hear evidence that they do, I think I'll keep eating them!”

But it did start me thinking.

When I chose not to eat meat, I, like most people who have become vegetarian, was probably thinking about large animals, or at least animals, birds and fish I used to eat like beef from cows, chicken, haddock, pork from pigs, etc. I wasn't really considering the entire population of tiny animals, insects or microbes.

For me, choosing not to eat meat was a statement. A statement that it's wrong to kill animals, and that Man does not have to be a meat eater to live a healthy life. Looking back, I seem to have missed out several thousand species that it seems I was prepared to kill without a second thought! Those include ants in my kitchen, all the bugs on my windscreen and headlights I have summarily executed at 130 kilometres per hour; all the creatures that have habitats in the grass where I have run them over and chopped them up with the lawn mower; entire colonies of germs in my toilet, assassinated with bleach; and millions of micro-organisms in the cows milk before it was pasteurised (when I used to drink milk); not forgetting the mosquitoes I squashed on holiday last year.

So you see, I am a hypocrite. Every day I walk around in my big shoes stamping everywhere without a second thought for the tiny creatures that may be on the pavement – I'm too busy to be worrying about that!

When I was volunteering on the scottish island last year, we used seaweed from the beach to mix with our compost, thereby destroying the habitat of millions of tiny creatures. Without the habitat I had destroyed, they would then die. I can hear you now shouting: “Killer!” So just because I eat no animal products do not be fooled by the peaceful exterior. Inside, I'm as cold blooded as the lion who tears his victim apart. Except I don't eat the creatures I kill, I just casually leave them on the path to die in agony.

Last night as I was walking up the path to my house, I heard this crunch underfoot, and as I looked down I could see I had crushed a snail. “Oh I'm so sorry” I said, but it didn't hear me. It didn't nod and say: “Oh, that's ok, it happens all the time, don't worry, there's a million more like me, we're used to being stepped on.” I just had to pick it up and put it in the bushes where it probably died or maybe is still suffering.

Oh well, as long as I can't see it suffering, that's ok. The same goes for any animal that gets in the way of the car as I am driving along country roads. Bam! And that's the end of it for them (or maybe they suffer for some time before dying).

The thing is, we are tuned into the suffering of larger animals more because their cries seem to have an emotive effect on us. If you have ever heard a pig or cow suffering when they are being killed you will know what I mean. The difference with the tiny creatures, insects especially, is that they don't make any noise at all, they just squirm about until after a short time they stop moving, and we can pronounce them dead.

My mother taught me a great trick with ants in the back garden. First, boil a kettle of water. Second, take said water and pour all over ants. Ants then seem to disappear and don't come back for a while. Wonderful.

All without the use of harmful chemicals. An organic solution! The environmentalists would like that.

I never stopped to consider what was actually happening when the water hits the ants bodies at 100°C. I am not sure of the technical details, but I can imagine what would happen if someone poured the equivalent temperature for our size, on us. Excruciating pain followed by death I would guess. The difference between the ants is (a) we scream and they don't and (b) we think ants are pests. We do not know what part they have to play in the ecosystem, they aren't cute and cuddly like a labrador, there's billions of them, and actually, we're scared of them! In the great battle for survival, the resourceful human invents as many nasty ways to dispose of things he (a) doesn't understand and (b) doesn't like.

I guess that by eating non-organic carrots I am a vegetarian cold-blooded killer because they spray the carrots (and all veg) with pesticides (*a chemical used to kill pests*). Oh, and don't forget herbicides (*a chemical agent that destroys plants or inhibits their growth*) that are designed to kill anything Man considers a weed. I wonder how many micro-organisms and small creatures I have been responsible for the death of? Probably more than a couple I'd say.

Every time Man (oh, that's you and me by the way) gets an idea into his head about how to better his lot, someone else's ecosystem suffers. When a forest is logged for example, how many different species die or lose their habitat? But who really cares? We get nice desks, chairs, paper, etc. and our needs are greater than anyone else's, right?

Imagine if all these creatures had the use of language and organised themselves as humans do, how different would it be?

Us: Right then squirrel, badger, fox, and owl, we're logging this forest and there's nothing you can do about it!

Them: That's what you think. We're taking this case to the court of human rights!

Us: Eh?

We don't like a fair fight, we like an easy fight; and animals, birds, fish, small creatures (not to mention the ones we can only see under a microscope) are just that. Easy. They can't talk back. They can't fight back. They suffer silently. They die quietly. They are no match for our technology and our weaponry. We are the supreme hunter. We won. We're the top dog!

But like everything we do, it comes with a cost attached. The more we destroy habitats and change them, the more we interfere with the ecosystem as a whole. We have no idea why most of these creatures are on the earth, especially the ones who seem to be doing everything to make our lives difficult. But they don't know us; they just do what they can to survive.

Some of you may argue that that's all we're doing, but we've gone way beyond just surviving. We want it all, and we will let nothing stand in our way.

What to do?

I think we're all going to have to agree that if we can't see it, we can't really stop ourselves from killing it accidentally, right? And if a rabbit runs out in front of the car and we can't stop, it's just an accident, right? And if we happen to tread on a snail accidentally, it's just too bad. The same goes for micro-organism habitats etc.

But seriously, it is hard to avoid killing something at some point during the day, especially if you can't see what you are killing, and we will have to accept that sometimes it happens. There is no point in we vegetarians getting on our high horses and assuming a holier than thou position, preaching about not killing, when in fact we are all killers at sometime or other, even if we don't realise it.

The most important thing is that we acknowledge that there are tiny creatures who exist on this planet, whose job may be unclear to us. And it is our job to try not to wipe the planet clean of any creature however large or small for interfering with our plans for planetary domination.

We kill foxes because they try to get to the sheep, but all they want is to eat, and in the pens there are plentiful sheep – the foxes only want a few! We see it as a battle of good vs. evil, us vs. the animals who want what we have, but you only have to take a cursory glance at the “natural world,” as opposed to our

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

unnatural world, to see that they operate in harmony with each other, something we have long since given up doing.

We need to develop our awareness of the world around us, and be aware that if we are going to keep concreting and urbanising green land, and cutting down forests, we are affecting the ecosystem, possibly irreversibly. We cannot continue to trample all over this planet as if it were our playground. This planet provides the means by which we can all play.

Let us tread carefully

[Back to Index](#)

Knowledge

1. *The psychological result of perception and learning and reasoning*

We all like to think we know a lot about something. Some of us know a lot about aeroplanes, some of us know a lot about football, and some of us know what the strongest beer is to get us drunk. But what's the point of all this knowledge, and actually while we're here, what exactly is it? Is it physical, and if so, where does it exist? That's where I'd like to start this discussion.

We all know we have a brain, encased in a skull. Inside this brain there is some strange looking matter, which, whilst invisible to the naked eye, and having no visible moving parts, is doing some pretty amazing stuff. This amazing stuff also has the ability to store what we perceive, through seeing, hearing, feeling, touching, or smelling. This goes into the mysterious box in your head and is stored somehow (sorry I'm not a scientist!) into short and long term memory available for recall at some future time.

You could say it is physical because it is stored by physically connected cells in the brains; but it doesn't feel physical like your arm or leg, does it? It feels somewhat ethereal (*characterized by lightness and insubstantiality; as impalpable or intangible as air*). We know it exists within us, but it is nonetheless hard to try to pin down exactly where it is.

As we begin our investigation together, I would like you to try to put down your preconceptions of knowledge, and attempt to approach this topic with an open mind. Let us begin.

Is my knowledge the sum of me?

I questioned myself about this recently, because I wanted to know the answer. I was concerned that who I was, was only about what I had in my head, and how I communicated what I had in my head to everyone else. On the surface it makes sense, don't you think? People know me because of how I interact with them. They know me because of what I talk about. They know me because of the job I do. They know me because they have spent a lot of time with me, so know what I have been doing over the years. But do they really know me? I would have to say no.

People sometimes say I'm funny, because I can make people laugh quite easily, but how do I do that? I have frankly no idea; somewhere along the line, I must have learned to use language that triggers laughter. My mother thinks I'm clever because I can always fix her computer, but that is because I learned how to fix a computer. Everything that people praise me for, I have learned. People say I am a good massage therapist, but that is because I was taught by a professional how to massage. People say I am a good cook, but that is because I learned how to do it.

These are all just skills. These are the bolt-ons we talked about in the education topic. These are not the core of me, are they?

Without my knowledge of things would people not like me anymore? Without knowledge, would there be anything to like or dislike? The answer has to be a resounding no. If I had not learned language, or how to interact socially with other human beings, or had read books, or watched films, or travelled; I would just be a bag of bones connected up with tendons, and muscles, covered with a piece of skin, running on nature's blueprint to stay alive. I would not have the power of perception, reason or enquiry.

You may argue here that these are abilities that humans naturally possess; but these are skills, learnt from parents, teachers and peers. A baby may have the potential to possess reason for example, but cannot actually reason with an adult because he or she does not have the language capabilities to do so.

As the brain develops, so do the skills. Some of us become skilful, whereas others flounder, but all the "knowledge" is an add-on to the core of the human being, *not* an integral part. So when we say that someone is clever, or intelligent, what we actually mean is that they have put things into their mind which we haven't, and as we don't understand it, we are impressed by it.

My mother says "Oh, alan, I wish I was as clever with computers as you, I'd never be able to do what you do;" but that is because she has never ever picked up a book about computers in the ten years since she's had one, and has never taken a course! So how does she expect to have the knowledge?

It is not willed by god that humans have knowledge; it is a human process of being taught something, remembering it, and then using other skills, like investigation, to modify and improve the information.

I certainly don't think I'm clever (*skilful (or showing skill) in adapting means to ends*) in the way my mother thinks. If I hadn't read about computers, taken courses, made many mistakes, and observed and

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

listened to many others, I would also have the same skill level as her. So what of this idea of natural cleverness? Maybe some people's brain's have slightly different wiring that predisposes them to learn quicker, maybe genes has some part to play in it, but the learning you do after you are born is where the real knowledge comes from.

If, for example, all I know about is drinking in the pub, football, and picking up girls in nightclubs, is that all I am? On the surface other humans in society would say yes. They just judge from appearances. They may say: "He is very shallow," but is that my fault, given that I was conditioned from the moment I was born?

My father worked in a manual job, went to the pub, went to the football, read the tabloid newspapers, and didn't do anything else. What will he teach me? To appreciate mozart, or to understand the universe as we know it? Somehow I don't think so! Only because my father didn't learn about those things, and didn't know anyone else who knew about those things. It is not because he was stupid and incapable of acquiring knowledge.

Knowledge can be acquired at any age, although physically the brain may be more receptive when we are younger, and we may learn quicker. But my question to you still is: "Is that all that I am?"

START OF ME

Job: Factory worker

Hobbies: Like football, pub and nightclubs

Reads: Tabloid newspapers and celebrity magazines

Not married: Likes lots of girlfriends

END OF ME

What if I come from a wealthy family where art, science and politics are discussed openly and regularly? As I grow up what will happen to my knowledge? Will I only know about beer and girls, or do you think there is a good chance I might gain some knowledge of the things they talk about; that I may develop skills to competently discuss art or politics?

It is not given, as everyone's brains work differently, but it is more possible than if my family did not discuss them! I get sent to the best school, and when I grow up get a job in finance in the city, play the piano, and enjoy arts and politics. But is that the sum of me?

START OF ME

Job: City finance

Hobbies: Play classical piano, arts, and politics

Reads: Financial papers and literature

Married: Two children

END OF ME

On the surface these are two very different people, wouldn't you say? So which one do you prefer? If like me, you come from a family that discusses politics, arts etc. then you will probably prefer number two. Only because he has more in common with me. I may find him to be a complete bore, but at least I can discuss things I am interested in with him. On the other hand, if you like beer, football, tabloids and girls you would find him very, very boring, and so would gravitate towards number one.

So we have two men, from very different backgrounds, who both like very different things. Number one has not been taught to use his brain creatively – he sticks to very similar patterns that are easy to process; whereas number two has been taught to use his brain more and to develop other skills. They may both be nice family men, who love their parents and children, who have never engaged in violence; but we are impressed by the man who talks politics (but only because we have not learned the skill of it).

With knowledge, comes an unfortunate, often unconscious superiority over others which harks back to the taunting in the playground. "I know more than you, I am better than you, you are stupid..."

Superiority/Inferiority

So why do we feel inferior when in the presence of someone who has a lot more knowledge than us?

As I have told you before, my father worked in industry, as a managing director, and had many hundreds of employees worldwide. I remember the way he used to talk to me about the important things he knew about. He talked about the stock market and buying and selling companies, and I remember being impressed, but somehow feeling like I was beneath him, because I couldn't hold a conversation with him about takeovers, and he wasn't interested in the things I was.

So, in search of superiority, I would take a walk down to the local pub, where I knew that all the people I drank with did manual jobs, and they would be impressed with my knowledge and the fact that I travelled to Europe for my job, thereby making me feel superior.

But that's not what the acquisition of knowledge is for, is it? To make us feel good about ourselves? Is it not to further the understanding of ourselves, and the universe we inhabit? Oh, sorry, my mistake!

As individuals, we swallow up knowledge from the start. We learn about people and places, food and drink, and walking and reading and history and football and cricket and beaches and seas and mountains and fashion and shopping and how to do this job and how to do that job. The list goes on and on.

Some of us keep learning, whilst others are content to only learn so much. All around the world there are billions of bits of information walking around on two legs, on topics as diverse as sport, science, warfare, deception, mass murder, idealism, fanaticism, spaceships, computers, brick laying, floor mopping, salad dressings, pick pocketing, wood carving, stamp collecting, saving money, ironing, car design and rally driving (to name but a few!)

Just stop and think about it for a moment, would you? Look around you when you are in the street, and look at all the people. Not only do they all look different, act different and dress different, they also all have a unique collection of knowledge. No one person's knowledge is superior or inferior. And they pass you by. So not only do you not know what they're thinking, you also have no idea what they know – until you speak to them. How strange. All that knowledge wrapped up in bone and tissue. Inaccessible by any machine except conversation with another human!

How often do we hear about someone who has just died, and discover they were knowledgeable about things you wouldn't dream they would know or be interested in; and they died without sharing that knowledge with anyone else. So much knowledge gained, yet so much taken to the grave without ever having seen the light of day. So what use is all this knowledge then if it is not to be shared?

Apart from learning obvious things to help us find work to get money to pay the bills, are we just learning things to keep ourselves amused, or maybe to stop boredom from setting in? We seem to accumulate knowledge at a rate almost as fast as we accumulate possessions and we store it. We can't help it. Our eyes take it in and the brain stores it.

So why are we acquiring it?

Perhaps you believe that knowledge is what sets man apart from the animals. The ability to not only learn, but to better ourselves through the acquisition of it, and maybe you might be correct. After all, it is only through the passing of knowledge from one person to another that we have become so inventive. One man invents the wheel, another builds a cart, another domesticates the horse to pull it, another invents an engine to do away with the need for a horse! A perfect example of human discovery, saved as knowledge, and passed down to the next generation as education.

So we have all this knowledge, stored up, ready to be passed down, but hold on a minute, how much human knowledge do we want to pass on to our children, and in any case how much of what's in our head is just junk?

Imagine for a moment your house. It may be a big house or a small apartment, but just think how much junk (sorry, possessions) you have. How many of them are worth keeping? How many of them would you want to pass on to your children and grandchildren? If you're like most people, it wouldn't be many. Maybe something really special perhaps.

It's the same with knowledge. We obviously want to pass on important stuff to the next generation, but do we want to burden them with our baggage (excuse the pun); do we want them to be discoverers; to have free minds; or do we want them to be conditioned clones of ourselves, because I'm sorry to say, that's what's happening. We pass on our prejudices; our likes and dislikes; our culture; our hatred; our religion; and our opinions. I can hear some of you saying "But it's impossible to not pass it on, it's part of who I am," and there

is the key.

You believe that this knowledge, in the form of religion, opinions, politics, etc. is part of you, and you cannot separate yourself from it. You may have been indoctrinated and conditioned by your society but that does not mean you *are* the knowledge. It just means you have to unlearn (*discard something previously learnt, like an old habit*).

Unlearning – The path to freedom

So here we both are, with our big brains bursting at the seams with this human knowledge. I can't see your knowledge, and you can't see mine, but all this knowledge has only lead to fear, hatred and division. We may have planes in the sky and cars on the roads thanks to knowledge, but we have deception, killing, greed, poverty, corruption, and desire – all things that still exist in spite of all this learning.

I am not saying we have to forget how to build a motor car or a jet plane (although it may help the environment somewhat), what we need to unlearn, are the unhelpful things that lead us away from love and compassion. We are caught in the prison of memory, even if the memories are not our own. These memories are dutifully passed down from father to son and son to grandson without them even being consciously aware of it.

In this country some groups of people hate “pakis” (*a derogatory word for people from pakistan*) because of no other reason than they have learned to hate them. How can we call ourselves the most intelligent species on the planet when we pass knowledge on which furthers division between us?

For centuries, the british ruled ireland, and now even after many years of independence, people still hate the british, even if the actual people that oppressed them are long dead. Everyone hates everyone for some historical reason, but that's all it is, history. Yes, some people may have been cruel to other humans but that is past. If it is finished with we must let go and move on, otherwise we are carrying the past into the future, which is surely a dangerous thing to do.

History, which is the sum of the past, is full of horrendous stories of slavery and rape and murder, and I know that these acts are still being carried out in some parts of the world, but what we are talking about here is moving towards unconditional love; and love is something that takes place in the present. It can never take place in the past or the future. Our memories or knowledge however pleasant, or important they may seem, are always unwittingly keeping us in the past.

To see clearly you have to forget what you saw

Some of us don't want to see clearly. We would rather stay locked into what we know – afraid to give it away in case there's nothing better to replace it, in the same way that we cannot give up our possessions; because who would we be without them? Who would people think we were if we had no possessions? So we jealously guard our knowledge, afraid to ever give it up, always waiting to impress someone somewhere with something we know.

But we have to let go of psychological attachment to the knowledge, because it is only stopping us from seeing who we truly are. We are barricaded behind school certificates, degrees and mba's; we surround ourselves with news of political affairs, the arts, or religious scriptures; and we hide physically behind our material possessions; Our cars, our jobs, our status, our mobile phones, our range of credit cards.

We are all afraid in life, and that is why we surround ourselves with items to make ourselves happy, ever mindful that if we stop filling our head with knowledge, then one day we may come face to face with our real thoughts. To find freedom from fear, we must face ourselves without external knowledge, it is the only way to understand that you are not just your degree in engineering, your bmw, and a great personality. You are one part of a whole universe. A contributor to universal love and compassion. You are energy and light. You are pure and whole.

Inside each one of us is a core. I cannot explain to you what that core is, but you can see it for yourself. With no definable structure, you cannot see or draw it, yet, if you look, you will find it. You will sense that connection to the universe, something that lets you know that there is no need to be afraid as you are

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

interconnected with everything else. That thing I do not call god, that is Man's label, and it is not the same as belief, as there is nothing to believe in, nor is there any need to gain knowledge of it. Just to notice and be aware of it is enough.

Brick by brick, you and I must start to disassemble the protective structure we have built around ourselves. Only then can we transcend fear and human knowledge and embrace our universal wisdom. That wisdom, as I have found out, resides in every one of us. You don't need to remember it, study it or look it up in an encyclopaedia, but definitely don't take my word for it. Doubt it, question it, and reject it, but don't ignore it. The time has come when all of us need to start to look inward.

[Back to Index](#)

L

Language

1. *A systematic means of communicating by the use of sounds or conventional symbols*
2. *(language) communication by word of mouth*
3. *The cognitive processes involved in producing and understanding linguistic communication*

Every creature on this planet has some kind of language, although we have no means of understanding what they are saying. Zoologists have interpreted some of the sounds in primates, and translated them to mean things like “I am hungry;” “there’s a predator over there;” “where are you?” etc. But from what we know, most of the communication is very basic; whereas Man has a rich vocabulary, and is able to communicate complex themes via his voice (*the sound made by the vibration of vocal folds modified by the resonance of the vocal tract*) made possible by millions of years of evolution.

Language started as mere grunts – so I am lead to believe – and over time, we learned to control the vocal cords and develop more complex sounds. An alphabet was formed, and words were created. I do not know if this happened all over the world at the same time, and why we developed this ability, but as I am not a scientist, I am unable to answer these questions!

So the starting point for our discussion today is not related to biology. What I want to ask you today is: “Who would we be without the use of language?” Could we think? Would we be able to deliver complex ideas to others without speech? Stop for a moment and consider these questions, as they are complex indeed. Now let me tell you a short story.

Let’s talk

I like to talk a lot. In fact, many people have said that not only do I like to talk a lot, I love to talk, and unfortunately, I have to agree with them. There are always so many things on my mind I want to say to people, and there just never seems to be enough time in the day to say them. I often find myself getting so caught up in what I am saying that I forget the point I am trying to make. My mother talks a lot too so maybe I have “caught” the talking bug from her!

I used to talk all the time on my mobile phone, until recently, when I got rid of it once and for all. I realised I was just talking for talking’s sake. Nothing I was saying was really important, it was just idle chatter – a chance to keep my over-active brain more active. Talking lead to more talking and more talking led to more discussion, and more discussion lead to arguments.

I argued my case for vegetarianism so many times which just ended up with me getting angry and talking more. It resolved nothing of course, except perhaps, raising everyone’s blood pressure!

It was only when I went to a monastery – which was a place of great silence – that I started to think about this. Here was I, supposedly intelligent, constantly arguing with everyone, chatting with people, gossiping; suddenly plunged into an environment where talking was forbidden! I showered in silence, got dressed in silence, ate breakfast in silence, walked in silence, ate lunch in silence, meditated in silence, ate dinner in silence, and then slept. No books, no writing, no music – just a lot of silence.

The first day was intolerable; actually, I should say, the first thirty minutes were excruciating. I wanted to scream out loud, I wanted to hear my voice. My brain was aching to talk. “This isn’t normal,” my brain kept telling me, “Man isn’t supposed to be silent! Man is a talking animal, just talk! This place isn’t for us, we like fun and we like jokes, how is anyone to know we have an extrovert personality and we can be great fun to be around? We should leave now, before it’s too late.” Hours went by and I was feeling more and more tense. I felt like I was about to explode. I needed to talk to someone. Desperately.

I may not have been talking out loud, but inside my mind my brain was talking to me at a million miles an hour. It seemed as if I would go mad if I didn’t talk out loud, even if no one was there to listen to me, so I did something silly. I went for a walk and started talking out loud! At first it seemed really strange to hear the words coming out of my own mouth, then I thought to myself, “this is stupid, if I am really here to understand what it is like to be in silence then in silence I shall be! I will suffer my brain constantly taunting me and eventually it will quieten.”

Several days later, and I was *still* suffering. It was only when I stopped fighting with myself that I eventually started to enjoy being in silence, not only on my own, but mixing and still communicating with other people in the group in silence. I was starting to understand how much language got in the way of real communication, implausible as it sounded.

Blah blah blah

We use language to communicate who we “are” to other people, don't we? “Hi, this is alan, he's a marketing executive for a large firm in the city,” “Oh yes, I have a house here in the city but I always go to the country at the weekends. We have a house there you know...” “Well I was driving a mercedes, but now I drive a bmw, I find it to be a much smoother ride.” Blah, blah, blah. We go on talking incessantly, boasting, name dropping, ego tripping. “Yeah I've got the new game station,” “well I've got a new laptop, it's top of the range you know,” “I've got all this money,” “I've got no money,” “I'm really miserable,” “Oh, are you? I'm really happy at the moment,” “Have you got a new boyfriend?” “Yes, I have, and he's really great and he's so funny, you'd love him...” “I just split up from my wife, she's not getting a penny from me...!” “I hate him, he's such an idiot.”

Does language get in the way? What do you think? “Get in the way of what?” you are probably thinking to yourself.

Let's start slowly shall we?

We have been born with the gift of language, which we would lose, according to research, if it is not used in the first couple of years of life. We would not be able to talk and shout and gossip and hurt and scream and punish and hate amongst other things...

Hmm, seems like not a bad thing! You see, you need language in order to communicate these concepts. A lion may bare its teeth at an opponent and growl, the way a dog does when it approaches a strange dog, but that's it. It does not constantly chastise its offspring, and tell them they are failing at school, and they are no good at anything, and why don't they pull their socks up, and how will they ever get a job, and if they don't get a good job then they will have a terrible life, and what about when they retire, they'll have no money and they'll be relying on state benefit and on, and on, and on...

The funny thing is, you do not need language to communicate love, empathy and compassion, these are above the realms of human language.

Couples fight over money, jealousy, this years holiday, the size of their house, the need for a new tv, why the other doesn't earn enough, the need for a new car, why so and so's husband is doing better than you. They may even say they are not talking to the other, as a means of punishment and to the person left in silence it feels like torture. “Why are they not talking to me? I need to talk,” but that is just the brain desperately wanting to talk, the other knows this and uses it as leverage to get you to apologise. Which again is talking.

But they never fight over love. Words are immaterial. They may say things like “I love you,” but the feeling is communicated without the language. They can look into each others eyes and know they love each other. They do not need to talk. There is a point which when crossed moves from the realm of the mind, the thought, into that which cannot be explained verbally. Try this with your loved one tonight, or with your children. Just sit for a minute with them and stare into each others eyes! Let's call it an experiment! What information is being communicated to you, how do you feel in the silence, how do they feel? Uncomfortable?

Silence is a strange thing isn't it? We often feel this at parties where we don't know anyone or the music stops for a moment. I think people call it “an uncomfortable silence,” don't they? We find it hard to be in a room full of strangers without background music or talking. The music somehow fills a gap in the talking, and that's what the brain wants, no gaps. Lots of talking. Must keep talking, whether it's inside the brain, or outside in speech. It can't be alone without noise, it must have noise otherwise it will go crazy.

Suddenly this whole language thing seems like a bit of a burden. But I'm sure most of you still can't see who you would be without it.

Let's imagine that you, like my uncle's parents, were born deaf-mute (*unable to hear language or speak language*). What do you think is going on in their brains? Are they constantly chattering to themselves, thinking and planning? Well it seems unlikely if they have never heard language being spoken. So perhaps there must be a lot of silence in their minds.

To us, we see that being born deaf-mute is a terrible affliction, and we pity them. But why? My uncle's parents could not hear nor speak, yet they fell in love and gave birth to a child through love. It seems like there was an awful lot of communicating going on! It's just that we can't understand because we are too busy talking. Sure they can communicate with sign language and the written word but the power of speech has been removed. Do you see? Verbal language contains a certain energy that silent communication can never

have. We can almost feel the power of a dominant speaker like a general rallying his troops to war but in silence we communicate differently.

We can of course, communicate negative feelings like hate, anger and displeasure without talking by displaying facial or body signals, and we can display status signals like having a large house or a sports car but it is the spoken word that is generating much of the mischief we see in modern life.

**

Stop for a moment and reflect on love. What is it about love that sets it apart from modern language? What is it in love that bypasses the need for idle chatter? Imagine for a moment communicating with everyone in that language; how different would the world be? How much hate and sorrow would we cause? How many people would we hurt with our words?

So often we hurt people with the things we say. Remember in the beginning of the book when I asked you to consider the impact of two statements: “I love you” and “I hate you”? Hopefully, you can now see the power of words, and how frivolously we use them.

“I give love unconditionally to all” is not a statement you often hear, but I offer it to you now in the language we both understand. What a different world we create with that statement compared with “I hate him, I hate his religion, I hate you, I hate her.”

We must start to realise the impact that this wonderful and sometimes terrible addition to our species has brought. If we are to use language at all, then the language we use must come from love, from empathy, and compassion. How else are we going to communicate with our children and our colleagues, let alone people who are from different cultures, speak a different language and have a different religion?

Anything that does not come from love breeds hate and violence. Look into this for yourself. I am not speaking the truth here. This is only my opinion, but it is of the utmost importance for us all that you look into it – every day.

Every time you speak to your children, your friends, your parents, even people you dislike, ask yourself this question: “Where is this language coming from. Is it born of compassion for all or is it something else?” It is a difficult question and one I too have found myself in much conflict over. My mother used to have a saying: “If you have nothing good to say, it is better to say nothing at all.” I don't know where it came from, but it has stayed with me always.

We should all practice a little more silence in our lives and start to realise that until we know our own minds thoroughly, we can never be sure what the tricky little brain is going to get us to utter! The violence of language breeds only more violent language. You only have to watch an argument start then heat up, then explode into rage, before possibly ending in a fist fight or worse. There can never be a winner in a verbal argument, both are losers.

So why do we want to hurt another with our words? What benefit is it to humanity? Maybe all we are, is stuck in a million year old pattern of status displays, one-upmanship, dominance and instilling fear in others; except we have replaced the lions roar with complex cruel, hurtful sounds.

We have not yet learned to use this powerful language kindly; we have not learned that love has no language, no status, no power to exert, no violence.

It is time to stop talking.

Silence, once understood, is truly a beautiful thing, and you will quickly discover more language than you ever thought possible. Let the powerful and the dominant hear our silence.

[Back to Index](#)

Law

1. *Legal document setting forth rules governing a particular kind of activity*
2. *The collection of rules imposed by authority*
3. *A generalization that describes recurring facts or events in nature*
4. *A rule or body of rules of conduct inherent in human nature and essential to or binding upon human society*

Imagine a world without law. A world where there are no man-made rules and restrictions on anything you do. No one tells you what to do. You are free! Free of all restrictions, and free of all control from the authorities. What would you do? Who would you be? What would you become? That is what we are here to find out.

So what is law?

Law is merely a set of rules, created over several thousand years by powerful men to create order in their lands, and make sure people behave in a manner they require. The law sets out penalties for non-compliance of these laws, and courts have been set up to deal with such events. If you are found not guilty you may go free, but if found guilty, you will be punished for breaking the rules – anything from a fine to a prison sentence, but perhaps even sentenced to death.

Most people are happy that there are rules to control the more wayward members of society, and it is only the minority, not the majority who break them. As my mum once said to me: “If you've done nothing wrong, you've got nothing to fear from the law.” Law is simple. These are the rules. Don't break them equals no problem. Break them equals problem. Any civilised person would agree that we need these rules to stop the more “dangerous” people from behaving in ways that harm others.

Although law exists in all parts of the world, laws vary widely from country to country, and even village to village. There is no universal law created by man, because each man who creates laws in his country thinks differently.

In Britain, if you steal apples from a shop, you may receive a fine, but in Saudi Arabia, they may cut your hands off. If you kill someone in Britain, you will go to jail for a long time; but in some parts of the world they will hang you, electrocute you or shoot you. In some countries, speaking out against the government is punishable by torture or death, and in some countries it is positively encouraged. In some countries killing a cow is a crime, and in others it's a business.

These are laws created by whoever is in power at the time. It is an individual opinion of right and wrong, and punishments vary widely from place to place. Law can also be modified instantly with a change of government, even in a fully functioning democracy. One day something is illegal, the next it's not.

Courts and judges do not decide law, they merely apply the law of the day; there is no moral or ethical judgement. If the law says it is not illegal to kill another human being, you will never be convicted of killing a human being (until they change the law that is). Do you see? Law is transient, not fixed.

If I am in government and make not carrying identification illegal, punishable by twenty years in prison, and you break this law, you will go to jail. But if I am defeated at the next election, and I am replaced by a new government, they may reverse this immediately and you will go free!

Law is ultimately changeable on a whim, depending on the mood of the government, and the one thing we should not accept, is that law is truth. Right and wrong is a man-made concept, designed to control the population; to keep them in line; to show them who is really in charge of their lives; and to let them know that if they fall foul of these laws, they will be punished to let the rest of the population know that disobedience will not be tolerated! After all, making murder illegal does not stop it happening, it just states that if you commit murder you will be punished.

Democracy

1. *A political system in which the supreme power lies in a body of citizens who can elect people to represent them*

If you are one of the people lucky enough to live in a democracy, and not a country ruled by a military junta or a homicidal dictator, then you will have the right to vote for whichever party you believe will serve your interests best. Each country has its own special rules, but generally you will vote for a local member of parliament, who will represent you at a national level. He or she will probably belong to a major political party that will have their own agenda to push through.

They (the party) set out specific things they wish to achieve during their term in government in what's known as a manifesto, although most people never read it. Once in power, the government will try to get

some of their bills (*a statute in draft before it becomes law*) passed. Some you will like, others, you may not. You may like that they're tough on immigration, and have passed new laws to repatriate illegal immigrants, but you may hate that they have passed a new law to make you carry identification at all times to prove who you are. They may not have had this bill in their manifesto, but have rushed it through in light of “recent developments” which have forced them to act in such a way to “protect national security.”

So what are you to do? You voted for the party you liked, but you don't like some of the new laws they have passed. In a democracy, you get the chance every four or five years to change the government, so you decide to vote for another party, but are dismayed that all the parties think that carrying identification is a good idea, so you don't vote in protest at the identification system. But as most other people agree with the party's stance on carrying identification, someone gets elected.

But what if the majority of the population disagree with carrying identification? Well, normally if a party wants to get elected, they'll drop it as a campaign issue, or may promise to revoke it if it has already become law; that is the only chance you get to directly influence the law, before a new party is elected. Once you have elected them, you cannot just change your mind, you will have to wait another four years.

You cannot just decide to change the law, that is for the politicians you elected to decide. You can protest all you like and try to influence them, but they still may not waver from their policies and will continue to try to get bills passed, after all, that's what they have been elected to do.

If you don't like it, wait until the next elections come around and have your say along with the rest of the population. That's democracy. If you do not live in a democracy, then I am so sorry but you are under complete control of those who have seized power, and challenging the law, will normally mean a lengthy prison sentence or death for you.

A little experiment

So hopefully, we now understand that law is a man-made, country specific tool, to control the population. You may not agree with me here, and may still believe that, “law is what makes us civilised! Where would we be without law? We would be no better than the savages.” And that is *exactly* what I want to discuss here with you now.

How many laws do you have in your country? Have you any idea? I certainly haven't got a clue, but I am sure there must be literally tens of thousands in my country, covering everything from what side of the road I must drive on, to rules about going to the toilet outside! So let's begin.

From today onwards, all laws have been revoked. You may now urinate where you please, drive on whatever side of the road you like, you may steal at will, murder and rape, build houses and offices wherever you like, fail to pay taxes, it doesn't matter, because no one will tell you it's wrong. After all, how could it be? There is no punishment, therefore there can be no crime.

What I want to understand is whether law has evolved as a natural control mechanism because humans cannot live together peacefully, and have no self-control, or as the result of men having power over others, and wanting to hang on to that power, whether religious, military or political?

Now there are no laws, would you revert to barbarous (*primitive in customs and culture*) behaviour where anything goes, or would you start to feel more empathy, compassion and love for all around now you were free of control? Would you still continue to believe that things were wrong, if no one told you otherwise?

Let's talk about drinking and driving, something which is obviously a dangerous combination, for you and all other people on the road. In the past it was illegal, and you faced stiff penalties, although it didn't stop people from engaging in it, but now you can do it whenever you want. Drink ten pints of beer, get in your car, run down a family of four, and feel none the worse for it. After all, it's not illegal.

What if someone refuses to pay your invoice for work you have done? There are no courts you can take them to, so what do you do? Do you just talk nicely to them until they pay up, or do you resort to verbal and then physical abuse, and beat the money out of them? It's ok to do it, because it's not illegal to beat someone up anymore.

What if you really want to have sex with someone. Do you still buy them drinks, sweet talk them, then ask them if they want to come back to your place, or do you just grab them, drag them back to your house

and force them to have sex with you? After all, it's not illegal anymore, nothing can happen to you. You won't go to court, because there are no courts, because nothing is illegal. Do you understand?

What if you want to build new houses in a street and the people living there refuse to accept your offer of monetary compensation if they move? No problem! Turn up at 6.00 am on a monday, and start bulldozing their houses – even if they're still in bed. You offered, and they refused. It's their own fault. Even if you kill or injure a few of them, and the rest go homeless, who's going to stop you? It's not illegal, *nothing* will happen to you so you can do whatever you like.

But the one thing we're forgetting here, is that although we can do what we like, because there is no more law, that means the other people (the people you affect) can do whatever they like as well... And here's the flip side.

As you attempt to drive away from the scene where you ran down a family of four, an angry mob gathers, witness to what you have just done, and drags you out of the car, and beats you to death, after all, it's not illegal.

The man who refuses to pay your invoice threatens you and promises that if you ever come near him again and demand money, he will find your family and hurt them.

The woman you want to have sex with has her boyfriend in the bar, and on seeing you attempting to drag her out, stabs you in the heart, after all, it's not illegal.

The people whose houses you have destroyed find out where you live and not only destroy your house, but steal all your possessions, shoot you and leave you for dead. It's not illegal and although destroying peoples homes is not against the law the people feel ever so slightly aggrieved at your actions and in return punish you for your actions.

So as you can see from these simple examples, punishment is not absent in a lawless society, it is directly meted out by the people. The only difference, is the severity of the punishment may not match the crime.

People will not stand by and watch terrible things happen to themselves or their family; in the end they fight back. All law is doing is controlling that natural urge to administer personal justice and making sure the person is actually guilty before they punish him, something mobs and vigilantes do not explore in any great depth!

So who are you without law? Are you a caring, empathic individual, who wants only the best for his fellow human beings and has a deep understanding of what it is to be human, or are you without feeling for the rest of mankind. Someone only interested in what you can get for yourself, without any thought that your actions may cause suffering?

We have labelled ourselves “the most intelligent being on the planet,” but is that who we really are? If we see the suffering and exploitation that mankind exerts, not only on other humans, but on animals, and the natural world we live in under the rule of law, it is hard to see that we would suddenly change if the rule of law were to be removed.

I believe that Mankind is not ready for law to be summarily removed. We lack the qualities that even most animals possess in being able to live together in balance. We are unbalanced as a species; our brains have not evolved past that of our ancestors in anything but our development of technology.

None of us like to feel controlled, especially by some faceless concept called “law,” but we have to suppose, that in order to achieve some kind of “civilisation,” we have had to invent rules to control conduct.

Man is essentially no more than a violent ape, with the added bonus of being able to use the power of language to manipulate and dominate others. We are not ready to be left on our own, to work out what is in the best interests, not only of ourselves, but of the species as a whole.

We kill, deceive and steal at a will, wholly aware that rules have been created to stop that, and we are also aware of the consequences, but we do it anyway. We ruthlessly charge through our short lives, standing on anyone who gets in our way. We hate the rules, even if we can see that they are in the best interest of everybody. I am not talking about rules set up by despots to control the population for their own interests, (financial or ideological), the rules I am talking about are ones which we should know already without the need for governments to enforce them, but don't.

One more big shift

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

In order to remove the rule of law, we have to take a giant step. We have to make a shift in our minds that means that the rule of law would naturally fall away. That there would be no more need for judges, prisons, and courts, or written rules. Would it be possible? Certainly not today. Law underpins civilisation, and without it, we would crumble into barbarism.

Doesn't it make you sad that we have to be controlled with the threat of punishment in order to live (semi) harmoniously? It makes me very sad. Does the thought that the world would plunge into the darkness of chaos without law make you not want to look at yourself, at your actions, and make a positive shift in thinking? Probably not. You see, we only think of ourselves and our needs, without any recourse to the feelings of others.

If I gave you a list of things you should or shouldn't do, it would be no different from the rules associated with religious, military or political law. Who am I to tell you you shouldn't kill, or you shouldn't steal; or you shouldn't be violent, or you shouldn't say horrible things about people.

It is for you to understand your own mind, and in that understanding you will have evolved. You will no longer need a government to tell you what is right and wrong, you will never need a court to stand in judgement of you. You will be free and the man-made laws will naturally evolve into natural law. The law of compassion, the law of love, and the law of empathy. When you understand these three things, you will see they aren't laws at all.

Just feeling these emotions removes the need for any external control. Think about it. How can three small words remove the need for law?

[Back to Index](#)

Laziness

1. *Inactivity resulting from a dislike of work*
2. *Relaxed and easy activity*
3. *Apathy and inactivity in the practice of virtue (personified as one of the deadly sins)*

Laziness is a term you have often heard in your life isn't it? My mother always used to say to me "Pick your toys up, put your clothes away, tidy your room, don't be so lazy." I used to say a similar thing to my ex-wife when she would leave everything at her back. Cups and spoons hidden by the side of the sofa, plates, pots and pans stacked ten deep at the sink, clothes strewn everywhere. She, like many people, didn't think she was being lazy, she just thought she had more important things to do than keep things tidy (like watching tv). I have known many people like that. You wouldn't say they are generally lazy or slothful (*disinclined to work or exertion*). My ex worked as hard as anyone I'd ever met, whilst at work, and enjoyed going out and doing exercise; so what was it that made her almost apathetic at times? What is it that makes so many of us so lazy? Let's explore this together and try to understand it more.

We all enjoy lazy days, don't we? Especially when the weather is fine, and we can sit in the park or on the beach or in our garden. Just sitting, doing nothing, maybe reading a book, sipping a long cool drink. Ahhh! What better way to spend an afternoon? I certainly wouldn't call it laziness. I would call it an important relaxation exercise.

But we haven't always been able to sit around relaxing, have we? Before the dawn of industrialisation, the world was a very different place, primarily because there wasn't much time for sitting around. As with today, money didn't grow on trees, and people had to work long hours to get enough money to pay for even the most basic of goods. Remember there were *no* supermarkets, *no* local hardware stores, *no* cars to make getting between places easier, *no* direct electricity and gas to the home, and basic plumbing and a toilet if you were lucky!

Life was a lot harder then, and I can hear you all shouting "Good! We don't want to go back to that time, we much prefer it now." And so do I! I enjoy the comforts we have now.

I am sitting writing this in a beautiful library, on a laptop computer, with a table lamp on a comfortable chair, looking out of a double glazed window onto the wild elements of a scottish island. I am surrounded by hundreds of books, and the night storage heater at my back is keeping me warm. Even the kings and queens of yesteryear didn't have it this good. Remember that.

How is it possible that most of us actually live better than kings and queens? The answer is progress. Man developing new skills and new technologies, and for the first time, using his mind more in the process.

Back when we were simple peasants (*1. One of a (chiefly European) class of agricultural labourers 2. A crude uncouth ill-bred person lacking culture or refinement*), we used our muscles, not our minds. But thanks to intensive modern farming techniques, which use machinery instead of muscle, many more of us have been able to move away from agriculture to develop our minds, and learn new trades. Hence the modern reality in most developed countries, that the work is moving almost steadily from the hand to the mind. This can only be a good thing, don't you think?

We can now specialise in such diverse areas as engineering, quantum physics, manufacturing, marketing, law, hospitality, cleaning and waste disposal.

There are a myriad of new job opportunities, each one better than the jobs we had to do a hundred years ago or so. Opportunities abound to learn new things, to develop your mind, to improve. There is no way that this would have been possible for everyone even as recently ago as the second world war.

Now that we don't have to worry about where the next meal is coming from, and are not all out tending our crops, the possibilities are endless. Except we don't seem to grasp this idea so well do we? Thanks to many people dedicating themselves to developing new technologies to make our lives simpler (actually, just less physical work), we have been getting lazier and lazier (even if you think you are working harder and harder). Before you all start shouting that I don't know what I'm talking about, let me explain.

Do you remember the days before we had cash machines? I wonder how people got their money out of the bank? What about before you could pay for things over the internet with a little plastic card with a number, or even over the phone? Actually how about before there were phones, let alone little personal phones you could use all over the world, where people dial your number and the system finds you on a beach five thousand miles away! What about before you could heat a meal that had been prepared in a factory many miles away on a rotating turntable in an oven that never gets hot, yet your food does? Actually, how about before there were electric and gas cookers, because there was no gas or electricity?

The quicker and easier it is, the lazier we become

With each new invention, our minds become a little more attached to the comfort it brings. If you think about it, most of them are pretty good inventions: it is our complete reliance on them now that will cause us problems in the future.

Take for example, the television, which has only been in existence for little over 60 years (that means we have been several million years without it). Now we have digital satellite and cable, hundreds of channels. Whether you are poor, or rich, it is the modern accessory we cannot seem to do without. Not having a television is comparable to not having electricity in some people's opinion! What, No tv, how do you cope? And my answer would be, "just fine thank you."

A friend recently reminded me of the example of the tv remote control. You know how it is, when someone wants to change the channel and the following request is issued:

"Has anyone seen the remote?"

"No. Sorry."

"Argh, that's really annoying."

The idea of getting up to change the channel is as alien as not having the tv in the first place! We are so lazy we can't get up less than five feet away. We sit surrounded by controllers for the satellite, dvd and video. I can hear some of you shouting, "that's progress, not laziness!"

But I need it, I am so busy, I couldn't do without it.

Stop for a moment now and think of all the things you couldn't be without. What makes your life "simpler?" These days there are so many new ideas to stop us having to physically do anything, it's starting to get ridiculous. The last straw for me was when I saw an exercise table that moved your legs and arms for you! "Get really fit. No effort required whatsoever!"

So now we have gadgets galore to help us, what do we do with all this extra time? What do we dedicate ourselves to now we no longer have to worry (in the west at least) about the basic stuff? As I have stated in other topics, work has moved from the hand to the mind, and that is what I want to talk to you about here.

We have freed ourselves physically, and are now in a great position to develop our minds. What a great opportunity for self-development this is. We can learn more about ourselves, we can study life more, we can study anything, but what do we do? Well, to be fair, some people do use this time constructively, but most of us are so tired from the long hours we are expected to put in at work, that the only thing we can be bothered doing is to "veg out" in front of the tv, with a ready meal and a glass of wine.

It seems to me – maybe cynically – that the companies who are manufacturing items to make our lives easier, are doing it to earn money from the companies we work for, so we can stay at work longer, without having to worry about what we are going to have for dinner, and what we will do in the evening. Everything is laid on for us. In fact, everything is sooo convenient now we don't have to go home from work at all.

But seriously, we do spend most of our lives at work. I have been over this several times before, but if we get up a 6.30 am and get back around 6.30 pm (some people work much longer), that is half of our day dedicated to work. That doesn't leave much time for anything else. It's just rush, rush, rush.

A well deserved rest

So if our lives *are* very busy, and we *are* over-stretched, maybe this so called laziness I am talking about here is no more than a well deserved rest period. Maybe my wife was right; maybe it is more important to do things you want to do instead of doing things you have to do, or that other people say you "should" do. What do you think? Explore your own day.

How long do you spend not just at work, but getting ready for work and getting home in the evening. Think what you like doing in the evening to relax. Would you consider yourself a lazy person?

The body has natural rhythms known as circadian rhythms (*A daily cycle of activity observed in many*

living organisms) which operate in a 24 hour cycle. During that time we have periods where we are energetic, periods where we are sleepy, periods when we are hungry. As you probably are aware, modern life has altered these rhythms beyond recognition. We get up at strange times, go to bed at strange times, take artificial stimulants to stay awake, eat at strange times – everything we do is strange!

If you have ever been awake just before dawn you will notice the silence followed by the sound of birds chirping and singing, which they continue to do just up until sunset, at which time they promptly retire for the evening and stop singing. They have had a full day of work and now they will follow it by a full nights sleep to recuperate for the next days activities. But you see, they have to get up and go to sleep in tune with the sun, because (a) they haven't invented electric light and (b) they haven't got eye shades (or curtains) so they can have a lie in.

Nature's rhythm

The first thing I have noticed since coming up to this little scottish island retreat, is the silence. There are only about fifteen volunteers here, plus the people who come up in the summer for courses. There are no lights on the island, and the quiet time is 10.00 pm. As it is a place dedicated to meditation, there is no tv, radio or music blaring out (a welcome change from the city).

When I first arrived, I was sleeping until my alarm went off around 8.30 am, and I was going to sleep about midnight – that was my rhythm. But the more my body detoxed from city life, and the more my brain became calmer (due to not being over stimulated by shopping, tv and music), and was allowed to just be, I noticed my natural rhythm starting to change.

They start meditation here at 6.00 am, which in the beginning would have been an arduous task, but now, two and a half months on, I am waking up with the birds at 4.30 or 5.00 am and getting on with my work straight away without feeling exhausted all day (and without the need for strong stimulants to start the day off).

It seems like a lifetime ago when I used to have to get up at 4.30 or 5.00 am to drive like mad to get to the airport to catch a flight – three strong coffees would have been the minimum requirement! Now, I have no need for stimulants because I have detoxed from them. I still enjoy coffee but as a rare treat, but not as a necessity for living; so at least I don't get those awful caffeine withdrawal headaches that so many of my colleagues used to suffer from in the business world.

It now seems as though I finally know, and feel, what it is to live in natures rhythm, although you may argue that this kind of existence is not possible in ninety five percent of towns and cities.

The 24 hour lifestyle has replaced natures rhythm. We get up because the alarm goes off. We go to bed late because we were watching tv, because we got in late from work and we hadn't eaten and we wanted to spend time with our partner and we wanted to relax (oh, and there is 24 hour electricity). After work we go out for a drink to relax, which upsets our natural sleeping patterns, and we eat heavy food late at night. We have jobs that start after we should go to bed. We take drugs that keep our body awake all night so we can have “fun.”

We are turning into 24 hour machines, and we are not designed for that. Somewhere, sometime the system will break down, and it is. It really is no wonder we are so stressed. We are so out of tune with our natural rhythm, that our body and mind doesn't know if it's coming or going!

Here's an idea. Buy a tent!

If you're like me, and are now shouting, “Help! I want to get off,” one place you can really experience this rhythm right now, is to go camping. You may think I'm joking, but I'm not. Everyone has been camping in the wilderness at sometime in their life, even you probably. Can you remember it? Do you remember when it gets dark, and there is no artificial light (save for a small torch). What time do you go to bed? (I am assuming you aren't like some campers who have a generator and sit up drinking beer and wine till late) Normally when it gets dark, right? And what time do you get up? Normally when it gets light, right?

I have been camping with people who have been so bored because there was no alcohol, no tv, and they

had to go to bed early. They even got bored with waking up early because there was no tv, no radio, and no newspaper, and they couldn't think what to do with themselves. They couldn't just *sit* and enjoy nature. They had to be doing something to keep their hands and minds occupied.

But we are all like that, aren't we? We can't just sit. We don't want to be alone with our own thoughts too long, so we invent things to occupy them. If humans had their way they would stay up 24 hours a day, every day. We force ourselves to stay up late at night, when our body clock is saying,

“Hey, time for sleep!”

“Time for sleep?” says you, “I'm just going out nightclubbing, you try to stop me! And if you pull any of that I'm tired stuff, I only have to pop a chemical, and I'll be wide awake again.”

Our whole life has become so unnatural. We are so desperate to be something other than what we are, a member of the animal kingdom.

So do yourself a favour, if you're not ready to see what nature's rhythm is really like, and go camping. I promise you'll enjoy it, as long as you just let it happen and experience it without judgement. Try to notice your thoughts while you lie in the tent or look up at the stars, and think about what you are missing. Think about sitting on the couch and eating a takeaway and leaving the washing up, and watching program after program on the tv. Then come back to the present moment and be aware of what you have.

Listen to the wildlife and feel yourself naturally reconnecting with nature and its rhythm. It may seem boring to you, and it may seem like an impossible way to live in a city, but then maybe we all have to look at our lives, the way we live, the choices we make, and see how out of balance we have all become. The more I follow nature, the more energy I have, the earlier I wake, and the more I get done during the day. Believe me, by the time I get to bed at 10.00 pm, I am ready for sleep. I figure if the rest of nature's doing it, why aren't we? We are not a nocturnal animal.

All the great philosophers and religions throughout the world have advocated getting up at dawn (approx 5.00 am) and sleeping at nightfall (approx 10.00 pm in the summer); that gives us 17 whole hours of day! That's a whole lot of time in which to live. Surely we can squeeze everything we need to do into that?

If we can't, maybe we should look at the activities we are trying to squeeze in, and if they aren't helpful or beneficial to the system, then maybe we should just let them go. Try it. Oh, and enjoy your camping.

[Back to Index](#)

Leader

1. *A person who rules or guides or inspires others*

We are surrounded by leaders, aren't we? Business, political, religious and military leaders abound. And it has always been like this. In nature, pack animals always have a leader and humans are no different. It could be said that out of all groups a natural leader always emerges. They are the ones who show the way (whether the way is right or wrong) and people follow them.

All over the world, there are statues erected of leaders of days gone by, cast in bronze or carved in stone. Great military leaders who fought bravely for their king and country, or political leaders who have changed the shape of history. Sometimes in dictatorships, the current leaders just erect statues of themselves to feed their own ego, and let people know of their status.

Some people have gone against the idea of one leader, and even try to organise their groups where everyone is the leader, where everyone has an equal voice, but that doesn't work either – all that happens is nothing ever gets done! So, whichever way we look at it, a “natural” structure always arises, with a leader at the top, and a pyramid spanning out underneath him.

But what I want to know is, do we really need someone to lead us? Do we not know the way? I do not want to talk about business, or politics, or the military, for the people that lead do so solely on their own agenda. They are not trying to inspire people, just convince them to follow them, do you understand? When the king, or ruler makes a speech “to inspire” the people, he is doing so to convince you to carry out his wishes, such as go to war and kill or be killed for him.

The leader I want to talk about does not seek to control nor receive adulation from his followers, but is someone who shows the way, by being the way. Do you understand? It's like walking the walk and talking the talk! The leader I talk about does the things he wants to inspire in others and does not require them to agree with him or even know who he is.

A great leader is someone who inspires but has no followers

So many people try to lead others, but ultimately all they are trying to do is gather followers. Some people only like the idea of being a leader if there are people to follow them. What would be the point of making a rousing military speech or engaging religious sermon if there were no one to listen? What would be the point in leading a political party if there were no members of the party? Do you see? A leader needs followers, or he is not a leader, he is just another man like you or I.

So what makes this man different, this leader without followers (which is surely a paradox (*logic a statement that contradicts itself*)). That we will find out!

Have you ever met someone who *hasn't* tried to convert you to something or other, or got you to join some organisation or campaign? We turn up and here is the leader speaking trying to convince us of the evils of immigration, the power of the lord, the need to save the rainforest, and a multitude of other (sometimes worthwhile) ideas. Have you noticed how convincing some of them are? “Yes. I will join the national party. The black man is taking our jobs!” “Yes, I agree. The only way we can free the animals from the animal testing laboratories is to start killing those who work there.” “Yes I see, the capitalist is evil, and needs to be stopped by any means necessary.” “Would I wear a bomb? Sure! Why not?”

Oh, we are so easily convinced!

Why are we so easily convinced? Because that is the leader's job. Nothing more. He is not there to have an open discussion on the subject, he is trying to get you to follow him, and if you do, he has done his job. It doesn't matter if he was convincing you to make jam for the summer fair to help the needy in the community, or convince you to attack parliament with a suicide bomb.

First, he gives you some background information, then uses some clever words so that his suggestion appeals to your mind, then he gets you to sign up. Easy! Like I said, we are so easily convinced, because we do not take the time to explore with our own minds. If we did, we may not follow quite so quickly.

But who is this leader I speak of? He says nothing to inspire you. He asks nothing from you. He does not want nor need followers, and he has no aims nor manifestos, nor ideas. He just is.

“So what makes him a leader?” I can hear you ask, “he clearly does not fit the definition of what we know a leader to be.”

To which my reply is “exactly!”

We have all been told to live this way or that way, think this, think that, become this, become that, don't drink, don't cheat on your wife, do not lie, do not steal, but how often is it that the leaders, the powerful, become corrupted, and do the very things they are preaching to us not to do! You see, these people are not leaders, they are people who want followers. Today they might be preaching about the environment, tomorrow they might be preaching about how great the logging industry is.

These are not authentic people. They do not believe this stuff in their hearts. They just want to lead somebody, anywhere! I remember my dad once saying to me: “Once you are a leader, you can lead anything,” and that rings so true with me now. Most people just lead for leading's sake. They may even sound passionate about the issue they are trying to talk to us about, because that's what leaders do, they *sound* convincing. Do they believe it themselves? Possibly. But what really matters here is that they just want to lead.

“Ever since I was a young boy I've known I would be a leader of men.” How nice! But empty, and worthless – the same as all the military, political, religious and business leaders. They would say anything just to get people to follow them.

“I think fox hunting is an integral part of english traditional rural culture.”

“Hear, hear,” said the followers.

Until the anti-fox hunting lobby got going, and the politician then contradicted himself:

“I think fox hunting is an unacceptably cruel activity which has no place in this country.”

“Hear, hear,” said the supporters. Except this time the followers were different, but the speaker was the same. Is this making any sense to you at all? I hope so.

The leader with no followers is different. Why? Because he stands alone. He is a person who, through great insight into the nature of all things, lives a life in balance with himself, in harmonious relationship with the universe and all other beings on the planet. I'm sorry, does this sound a little crazy to you? Perhaps it does, but to understand it, you have to let go of all you think you know about what it is to be a leader.

I used to try to “lead” people, but all I really was trying to do was to convince them through (mainly unconvincing) argument that I was right, and they were wrong.

Several years ago I realised (and it came as a great disappointment to me) that all I was doing was arguing. Sure, I might get a couple of people who thought I was right to follow my ideas, but why? Are my ideas perfect? Are they the greatest ideas ever to exist on this planet? Hardly! All I was doing was pandering to my own ego. The thought that I was better than anyone else – that I had the answers, and they didn't. But that is what a leader tries to do, to convince others he is right, and so I felt positive again. “Maybe it is me who will be the leader,” I thought.

But the day I discovered that there is no right and no wrong way, just a way, I gave up all my ideas of being a leader of men! Oh well, no followers. But who needs followers, apart from the politicians, the gurus, the colonels, the managing directors...

So who is this leader, if it isn't me and it isn't the politicians, the spiritual or the military leaders? Who is this leader? Is it you? Is it all of us, or is it none of us? What do you think? Please let this question go deep into your mind for a moment.

When I see the way, and that way is compassion and love, and I live that way every moment I breathe, who is the leader? When I tend my crops with love, who is the leader? When I love my brother although I do not know him, who is the leader? When I show empathy for another who is suffering, who is the leader? When my mind is free from violence and conflict, who is the leader? All has been said. The leader who does not lead.

[Back to Index](#)

Listening

1. *The act of hearing attentively*
2. *Hear with intention*
3. *Listen and pay attention*
4. *Pay close attention to; give heed to*

Listening is different from hearing (*perceive (sound) via the auditory sense*). Hearing is just as passive bodily function whereas listening is active, or should be. When we listen to a lecture, on a subject we are actually interested in we give our full attention to the topic. We are actively involved in the subject. We take in everything that has been said and process it carefully.

That's all very well when we're talking about a subject that is of interest to us, like learning a language so we can travel, or gaining a new skill for our job, but what if we are talking about a subject that is important, but one which you have no real interest in?

You see, we listen when it affects us personally, when the topic being discussed is related to “me.” My education. My job. My family. My security. My home. My pension. My holiday. My future. My children's future. If it's *me* your talking about, then I'm interested. How can this benefit me? I'm listening! But the world isn't just about you it's about me and you. It's about six billion people living on a small planet, somewhere in a place called space (*the unlimited expanse in which everything is located*)

But everything has to start with me, doesn't it? Even changing the world! It's no one else's responsibility, is it? Oh yes, I forgot, actually it is someone else's responsibility – anyone who likes, because I'm too busy doing the “me” stuff.

Ok, I'm sorry, I'm not being fair to you, but what I'm trying to understand is whether we only listen to things we're interested in, which to be fair, probably doesn't include saving the planet, and everyone who lives here.

Most people, including me, have to survive. We have to go to work to pay our bills, our credit cards, our car loans, our mortgage or rent and we have to eat. We work hard and long, and we are stressed by the end of the day. We are tired, and the last thing we want to be thinking about is someone else suffering in a faraway country, someone we will never meet.

“Benevolence is a hobby for the rich” you shout! “I don't have time to concern myself with saving the planet, it's hard enough getting by on my own without worrying about someone starving in africa, why doesn't their government look after them?”

And I would agree with you to some extent. Your responsibilities are primarily to your family and to your kinship group, and you must look after yourself before you can help other people.

Who will listen to me? Who will read this book? Will they listen to what I have to say? Do they care? Is it important enough to those who read this book to actively listen, or will they put it down because the subject matter doesn't interest them?

And this is the great problem. If you have paid money for this book, it means you actively sought it out because you were interested in the subject matter. If you weren't interested, you wouldn't spend your hard earned money on it. It's as simple as that.

Can I ask you a question? How do you get people to listen to you, if they don't think what you are talking about is interesting? When I started writing this book, I realised that, potentially, the only people who may listen, were those who were already interested in people, the mind and the planet. If you just go to work every day, don't give a damn about anyone else but yourself, and go through life using everything and everyone just for your own benefit, why would you buy a book like this? It doesn't make sense, does it?

Do you think politicians will read this? How about murderers, rapists, warlords, army generals, hooligans, drunks, drug addicts, fast food corporation directors, people who drop litter, shopaholics, criminals, supermarket shoppers and bosses, car drivers, or even fried chicken lovers. This book is not for these people! They wouldn't buy it, or read it, and even if they did, they may put it down rather quickly, because this is not a book about something they're interested in; it's a book which asks them to look at themselves. It's a book which questions the “me” and asks: “How do I affect the other people in the world by my actions?” and they may start to feel that they need to change something about themselves.

I am convinced that if you buy this book, you are already open to change, and that is such a pity, because the people who should read this, aren't interested. But I cannot force them to read this book, anymore than I can force anyone to do anything.

If I force you to listen to me. Are you really listening, or are you merely hearing?

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

The only time people listen to things they aren't interested in, is when it affects them personally. You can talk all you like about war, climate change, compassion, and love, but it's only when a bomb explodes, or a tidal wave destroys a city, or a member of their family is murdered, that people take notice. It takes something cataclysmic to invoke the desire to listen, the desire to change. This doesn't mean that the people will suddenly try to understand everyone else, and get to the heart of the problem, it may only strengthen their resolve; as In the following example.

A bomb was detonated in the london underground a couple years ago, by supposedly muslim suicide bombers. Scores of people died and were injured in the blasts.

Do the government and the people decide that they must try to find out what would cause a human being to blow themselves up, and kill other innocent human beings? No. They invoke even greater security measures, everyone is afraid of anyone from a muslim country, and the police are given greater powers of arrest; thereby creating more tension, more fear, and more hatred of people who look and dress differently to themselves.

So yes people did listen, but they listened to the government spokesmen, the media, and anyone else who had a negative opinion of “muslims.” They didn't want you to explore it for yourselves, they presented the “facts” in the knowledge that everyone is afraid of life, and offered a solution to protect you.

What I am trying to uncover here, is that actively listening does not mean believing. I want you to listen to what I am saying, but I don't want you to blindly believe it. I want you to explore it for yourself, not in the way a government presents evidence, and then says “make up your own mind,” but to explore every topic with an underlying feeling of love and compassion for everyone, and everything on the planet. Only then can you find out the truth of it all.

Listen passionately by all means, but then test it against the principle of compassion, and you will soon see if what is being said (by anybody) meets this requirement. You will not just be able to make up your mind, but you will see the real truth behind what is being said, whether it is you, your president, your media, your friend, or your teacher speaking. If there is no compassion in what is being said, then you will know it can never be the truth.

Listen with compassion
Explore with compassion
Understand with compassion
Act with compassion

[Back to Index](#)

Literature

1. *Creative writing of recognized artistic value*

We all read books from time to time. Some of us read constantly, others maybe just pick up a book at the airport. We read trashy sex novels, crime novels, scientific books, religious books, self-help books. In fact there are so many authors and different styles available that it is hard to know where to start!

I would like to begin this conversation with you by saying that it doesn't matter what types of books you read or whether some stuffy intellectual or critic thinks that what you are reading is of no artistic value, or isn't "serious" reading. What matters is that books are one of the best ways to see into someone else's imagination, and to have that imagination in some small way inspire us.

Of course, some books inspire us more than others.

When people read the koran (*the sacred writings of islam revealed by god to the prophet muhammad during his life at mecca and medina*) or the upanishads (*a later sacred text of hinduism of a mystical nature dealing with metaphysical questions*) or the bible (*the sacred writings of the christian religions*), those who read them are sometimes inspired to change their lives, and follow a religion. Others such as self-help books tackle specific topics that people want answers to in their personal lives. Scientific books inspire children to want to learn more about biology or chemistry, and others just entertain.

They all have their own place, and I think that books are tremendously important. More so than even the most educational television will ever be.

I remember reading a children's fantasy novel recently, and then going to see the film. I was so disappointed! I had imagined the main character as someone who looked and spoke so differently. I had imagined the land where it took place as something not at all like that presented on the screen. And the reason was that it was the director's imagination I was seeing. The book had allowed me to construct my own view of how everything would look. It allowed me to use *my own* imagination.

Questioning the unquestionable

What we must remember, is that books present a view, not the absolute, and I am sure I will get into serious trouble with all the major religions of the world for saying this, but books can never present absolute truth, for they are the word of another.

"How dare you deny the word of god! You will burn in hell!" I hear people screaming.

And maybe I will, but is that your view, or the view of the book you read that said I would? You see, with all books, whether they be "sacred" and unquestionable, or just an opinion, they all demand to be questioned. That is why I ask each and everyone of you to question everything I write here.

If sacred books are the word of the one true god, then surely he would expect that you ask questions? No compassionate god would be so presumptuous that everyone just followed everything he said, would he? That is why I offer my apologies to all who have chosen to be offended by what I have just said, but also ask you to place the question: "How can someone else tell you truth?" in the back of your mind.

Surely truth is something you discover for yourself, even if it eventually coincides with the writings. At least you will have verified what has been said to your own satisfaction, and gained true insight into the nature of all things, rather than repeating words written many years ago.

Now I find myself having to write about this topic very carefully. Why? Because talking about "sacred" books where the word of god is unquestionable makes me feel a little uneasy. You see, it is not that I deny god in whatever shape or form you choose to envisage him, nor do I deny the value of the teachings. In fact, in every book from the koran to the bible, the word of god seems to coincide with most of what I hold to be my most precious values. Truth, honesty, compassion, love, understanding; and whilst I am not here to question any of these "sacred" writings, all I ask people to do with any book is to question it.

Now there is no denying that it is wrong to steal or that it is wrong to kill, I just want to find out why, in my own mind. Do you understand where I am coming from?

I know that greed is a terrible disease that afflicts so many of us. The sacred writings talk of it, but I just want to explore it to my own satisfaction so I actually understand what it means to be greedy with my whole being. If I just repeated it from a book, I would see that yes, greed was bad and god said it was bad, and then just carry on with my life.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

How many people attend mosques, churches and temples, and pray to god every day, reciting extracts from the books, and listening to teachings about how greed is bad, and then close up their books and return to a capitalist consumer lifestyle?

How many people in the world read from the “sacred” books about how killing another is wrong, and then return to their daily business of war and violence? How many times have I heard western politicians talk about god, and the bible, before sending in their troops to other countries to kill and maim their people, and then talk about having god on their side?

Unfortunately, this has been seen before, during the crusades (*any of the more or less continuous military expeditions in the 11th to 13th centuries when christian powers of europe tried to recapture the holy land from the muslims*), and so it is little wonder that the muslim people are more than a little upset about the most recent incursion.

How can they use these great books to justify killing people? I cannot understand it, anymore than I can understand certain parts of the muslim faith, where they advocate killing all infidels and using the great words of the koran to back them up. No. These are not religious people. They use the most powerful book ever written to back up political, and extremist ideology, in order to control the people.

The fact they use the “unquestionable” word of god as their backup, just makes it all the harder for people to say that what they were doing was wrong. But the killing of any man, woman or child falls way short of what it is to live with compassion, and love for your brother, whether it is a muslim brother, a christian brother, a hindu brother, or even an atheist brother.

We are all creatures of the world, whatever religion we believe in, and using these texts to back up murder, rape, greed, power and torture is the greatest sacrilege (*blasphemous behaviour; the act of depriving something of its sacred character*).

We must not allow people who are determined to use these texts for their own advantage and personal gain to continue to do so. We must help them understand that what they are doing is not the will of god. If you believe that god created the earth in all its abundance and beauty, why would he give licence to a few powerful people to go around causing mayhem, and destroying everything he had created?

It is with great sadness that I watch television reports of people being killed by soldiers anywhere, and how they casually drop bombs on people, their homes, and their villages, and destroy the trees, and the grass, and the animals who inhabit it. For what, to prove they are right? To carry out god's will? Surely god would not allow Man to create such suffering for, who are, in effect, all gods children.

It is with greater sadness that I see people with bombs strapped to their bodies, ready to die for a greater cause, reciting words from their sacred texts, before blowing their perfect human bodies into pieces along with anyone that is close. No, this is Man's work, god did not sanction this.

So I do not ask you to question the word of god. I ask you to question yourselves. I ask you to question your religious leaders. I ask you to question your political leaders. I ask you to question everyone you meet – for it is only through these questions you will find truth. I decided to ask the president (you know which one) about his beliefs.

Me: Excuse me mister president, is there a reason you are callously killing lots of civilians in iraq?

Him: Well, we are trying to bring them freedom.

Me: So, it wouldn't have anything to do with your christian beliefs?

Him: No, but the lord guides me in my work.

Me: So god told you to kill the muslims, is that what you are saying?

Him: Now you're putting words in my mouth.

Me: Isn't freedom something you discover for yourself?

Him: No, we are freeing these people from tyranny and oppression!

Me: So, what you are saying is, that you are these peoples saviour?

Him: If you want to put it like that, yes we are, we are saving them.

Me: Who told you to save them? And what are you saving them from?

Him: I told you, tyranny and oppression! (angrily)

Me: So you don't want to convert them to christianity? You did say that the lord guides your actions.

Him: No I do not want to convert anyone, just save them.

Me: So is there a passage in your sacred book that justifies your actions?

Him: Actually no, it was the united nations who sanctioned this, although there is one passage...

Me: Thanks, I think I've heard enough.

Whenever people need to refer to a “sacred text” to give them more moral authority than others, you can be sure they are going to want us to go along with something that the texts probably forbids anyway! They just twist it to their own advantage.

So can you see why questioning these people is important? Hopefully the people who carry out this behaviour in the name of “god,” will finally get the insight into themselves, and what they are doing, and start acting with compassion and loving kindness, to all on this planet and beyond.

So read all you can, but question what you read, and try see it from another viewpoint.

If you are a christian, read the koran, if you are a hindu, read the bible, do you see what I am saying? In order to reach our own truth, which is the indivisible, we must gain insight. And to gain insight, we must question even the unquestionable.

In doing so we are not denying it, nor are we saying it isn't the way, we are merely opening our minds to possibilities. And if you are trying to find the divine, your mind is a great place to start. Open it, and allow compassion to be your guide in your exploration.

Inspiration

1. *Arousal of the mind to special unusual activity or creativity*
2. *A product of your creative thinking and work*
3. *A sudden intuition as part of solving a problem*
4. *(theology) a special influence of a divinity on the minds of human beings*

So, literature of all kinds can inspire the most heated of debates, as we have seen in the previous paragraphs, and can inspire us to do the most wonderful, or terrible things to each other. But inspiration is not all about what you have read.

I have read widely, on every kind of topic imaginable, but the inspiration to write this book was sparked by a person (my ex-wife to be exact), although she didn't know it at the time, and neither did I. Whether it was something she said, or something she did, I don't know, but from that moment my mind started to work more creatively. Then I read more on topics I suddenly developed an interest in, which sparked more interest, and inspired me to change my life. I then started to observe people, and nature, and finally myself, which gave me more inspiration. Soon it was becoming all too much for my little brain to take, so I started to write it all down. And gradually, the more I was inspired to look at something, or talk to someone about something, the more insight I got, and the more inspired I became. It was like a self-reinforcing loop that became stronger every day.

Suddenly I had written 500 pages, and I couldn't even remember exactly how I had started it, or even why! Let's just leave it at “I was inspired to write it” without trying to sound too mystical!

Some people are inspired by great poets, athletes, politicians, religious leaders or scientists to start something wonderful in their lives, but however the inspiration starts, it's like feeding an eternal flame that just won't extinguish. I only hope you all get to experience what I have felt from writing this book, and find your own inspiration in life. Whether this inspiration is from the divine, from your own mind, from nature or from another human being, it doesn't really matter.

We are a truly unique species, living in a wonderful universe, so full of mystery and beauty, and it keeps begging to be asked questions. “Who am I? Where am I?”

I hope you all find the inspiration to ask, and find out answers. But don't keep them to yourselves, share them with others, share them with your friends, your families, believers and non-believers. All should get a chance to explore what you have discovered. You never know, it may inspire others. I hope that one small section of what I have written in this book helps you to find some inspiration. But if it doesn't, don't worry. After all, this is just one book in a sea of millions!

But I have to put all this inspiration into perspective in the universe. The contents of all of my inspiration fit

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

on a single, tiny, microchip! This huge book, with all of my fears, my addictions, my successes, my discoveries, my joy, and my sadness, my insight and my lack of it; I have emptied my mind into this book; there is no stone unturned, nothing you do not know about me. I have opened up my entire life to you – all 38 years of it. You know all my stories, my opinions, all my jokes, all my ex-girlfriends, and my family. There is nothing left to tell. But all of it can fit on something so small, I can put it inside my wallet. That should give you something to think about!

Never stop being inspired. I won't.

[Back to Index](#)

Litter

1. *Rubbish carelessly dropped or left about (especially in public places)*

“If I don't drop litter someone won't have a job”

I used to, do you? I used to empty my ashtray under my car when I stopped at a service station on the motorway, or I'd leave fast food wrappers under the car, because I couldn't be bothered going to the bin; and of course, I *always* threw my cigarette butts out of the window.

I have no idea why I did these things. I wasn't deliberately setting out to make a mess or to cause someone more work. I just couldn't be bothered. I didn't consciously think, "I will drop this cigarette butt here and I don't care if I make a mess," it just didn't even cross my mind, it was a purely automatic response.

What a change! Why? Well, let's start from a different angle shall we? How many pavements, beaches, parks, rivers or streets are full of litter? What are the most offending articles? I don't have any statistics, but I can take a pretty good guess, what about you? Cigarette ends? Chewing gum? Plastic soft drink bottles and cans? Fast food containers? Plastic bags?

So who can we blame for this litter?

The cigarette companies, for making filters which are not biodegradable in the street? The chewing gum companies, for selling a product based on petroleum that sticks to the roads and any other surface it comes into contact with? The fizzy drink manufacturer for making bottles that don't self-compost? The fast food salesman for using so much packaging? The retailer who supplied the plastic bag?

As much as the general public, and the environmentalists would like to blame the companies responsible for producing the goods, for the litter; we have to look in a different place.

Let me ask you a question. How many banana skins, or apple cores, do you find littered all over the street? How many times have you been for a walk in the park, and said "Look at all the orange peelings that people have dropped everywhere."

Have you ever seen this in the city? Ok, maybe once or twice, but this is not something you see everywhere. Why? Maybe it's because people don't eat fruit outside, or maybe it's because the people who eat oranges, and bananas, are more responsible people! Maybe they are from a different era, where dropping banana skins in the street, is not acceptable.

All of these arguments could be plausible, although I don't think we're really getting to the bottom of the problem; and indeed it is a problem now. Everywhere we look, in every country in the world, there is litter.

Some countries have less litter, because they impose an on the spot fine, something governments have resorted to, because it's easier than finding the real reason behind it.

Litter is a sign that humans have been there. How many times do you walk through some area of natural beauty, and you see cigarette butts littered everywhere? The people who walked through smoking, were probably appreciating the scenery, as they dropped their cigarettes, or left their rubbish from their picnic by the side of the track. This was me, many years ago; appreciating nature, and ruining it at the same time, without so much as a thought that what I was doing was wrong.

How many people do you see flicking their cigarettes out of their car window as they drive along? Most of them. How many have ashtrays provided? All of them. I don't think I have ever seen someone smoking inside their house, then opening the window, and throwing the butt outside in the street. No, even the most unthinking people, with no care for the world we live in, usually use ashtrays and empty them into the bin, to be disposed of correctly (if only to be buried in the ground at a landfill site). Although some people throw apple cores, and the suchlike out of the car window, I have never seen someone throw an empty coffee cup out of the window. It's not acceptable.

This leads us somewhere interesting, don't you think? The definition of acceptable is "*judged to be in conformity with approved usage.*" Well, that doesn't mean that littering is approved of, but we learn what acceptable behaviour is, by watching, and imitating others, and if we see enough people doing it in our social peer group, it becomes acceptable.

If your peer group contains car thieves, then stealing cars becomes acceptable to you, although it's not accepted in wider society. If your peer group contains church going people you will most likely think that it is acceptable to go to church. For smokers, theirs is a large peer group; one that contains, smokers! And, if they see many smokers throwing cigarettes out the window it becomes acceptable behaviour for them as well.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

If you see chewing gum on the pavement, you know that a large number of people already do it; it's everywhere, same as takeaway containers and plastic bags. There is already a large amount of it littered around, so one more takeaway box isn't going to hurt, is it? And anyway, you were drunk, and you don't remember leaving it there, and someone will clean it up in the morning, and it wasn't hurting anyone! We never see our individual actions as harmful.

You say: "It wasn't affecting anyone." You say: "I am a decent citizen, and anyway, I pay my taxes, and that includes paying for someone to clean the litter in the streets. The end."

**

The other living creatures on the planet don't really drop too much litter do they? Maybe a small amount of excretory waste from their meal the night before, but on the whole, I couldn't really say I've noticed much litter left around the place from the birds, animals and fish in the sea, even when they die. Excretions return to the soil, and in death the body breaks down. They are part of nature and they return to nature. From them they supply other animals and insects with nutrients. Quite a nice little cycle, don't you think?

In fact, you don't really notice that animals and birds are there, do you? They just kind of fit in, quietly performing their daily tasks, without leaving a legacy of litter behind for a hundred years or more. Everything an animal uses is natural; everything comes from the natural world. There is nothing artificial used by animals. Why? Because they don't have the skills, brainpower, or need, to make it. As the most intelligent living being on the planet, we do have the skills and brainpower to make artificial products; but do we "need" to make them?

We already know that an animal doesn't need any more than he already has, but we are different. We have needs, desires, addictions, and wants. We have "needs" that cannot be satisfied by the natural world, so we have to fulfil them artificially. We have developed skills and machines that enable us to live more easily.

Let's face it, life isn't so difficult anymore; we no longer have to go out and hunt our food, we buy it in the supermarket, and we store it in the freezer for use sometime later.

Our ancestors never used to go shopping to the supermarket, had a takeaway, or chewed artificial gum! Why? Easy. They didn't exist. But with the advent of the industrial revolution, came the invention of new types of synthetic material, large scale production techniques, and the ability to make new products that companies could sell to the general public on a massive scale.

Gone were the days of people using nature for the products they needed. Now they could get products they didn't need and thereby activated a whole new pleasure area of the brain. The pleasure to get what ever you want whenever you wanted it even if you didn't need it. As long as you had one thing – money.

And so it began. Companies started making products people wanted; not because the people needed them, but because someone from the company invented them, and they thought they would make money by selling them to everyone. "Hang on!" I hear you say, "there have been some marvellous inventions over the years; so many things to make our lives easier."

Unfortunately, alongside this ability to mass produce things we wanted, liked, needed, desired, or craved, came a problem. They had to find a way to get it to us without the products becoming damaged. So they needed to invent packaging (*any material used especially to protect something*). This enabled goods to be manufactured in other countries and transported by rail or sea (or by plane or road now) and delivered to the retailer, in perfect condition for sale.

So let's recap. We are interested only in litter, and we have looked at the most prevalent types of litter in our streets, rivers, and parks. They are cigarette butts, chewing gum, plastic bags, and takeaway containers. Whether you think chewing gum is pleasurable, or you enjoy eating kebabs or burgers, the fact exists that many people do. Why? Instant gratification.

"I am hungry." I can eat a takeaway immediately and feel pleasure. "I need nicotine." There are twenty shops that sell cigarettes. I can buy a pack and feel pleasure. "I want to buy products from the supermarket on my way home from work, but how will I carry them home?" They have bags available to make it easy. The fact is, whatever the product, and whatever the reason for buying it, if I can think of it, I can normally buy it within one kilometre of where I am standing. That is the modern world. That is mass manufacturing and global distribution. I want it now and I can get it now.

Every pleasure has a cost. The pleasure of instant gratification, is the packaging required, to get it to us in perfect condition.

But we still can't blame the packaging, or the companies that make the products; even if we want to. They don't force us to consume them, or drop the litter on the ground, do they? Of course, we're very busy in our lives, aren't we? So anything that makes our lives simpler, helps.. We *are* busy, we are always working, always doing something. We're always on the go, always rushing somewhere. No time to stop, must dash, in a rush, can't wait. It's enough to drive you mad! So it's no wonder we stop at the takeaway because we are hungry, chew gum or smoke cigarettes because we're stressed.

Society made me drop it!

Could it be that because we are always preoccupied with something else that we don't even consider that dropping litter is important? Could it be that our busy lives take on more importance than disposing litter properly. What do you think?

"I'm walking along the street, and I'm hungry. I've had a busy day, and I got up at 5.30 am for a train to a customer. It's 2.30 pm and I need something quickly. I buy a burger, unwrap it, and the mobile phone goes, "hello? Yeah, I'll be there in four minutes." Hands full, I quickly dispose of the most unimportant thing, the wrapper; it's an important call.

I finish the burger, take out my cigarettes, and think what I'll say at the meeting. The phone goes again. I finish my cigarette, and stamp it out on the pavement, whilst reaching for my gum (I don't want the director to know that I smoke). As I approach the entrance to the office building, quickly think of my speech, and spit out the gum. It doesn't look very professional to be seen chewing gum in a meeting..."

We're not lazy, we've just got more important things to think about. Ourselves.

Now remember the animal, and the bird, and think of the fish. Do they need a cigarette to de-stress or chewing gum to freshen their breath? We need things we didn't need before, things that are not for the benefit of the system.. We are now programmed for success, for stress, for making more money. And litter is our by-product.

"But hang on, I earn lots of money and I care about the environment and I always put my litter in the bin. I never throw it away in the street!"

Maybe you do, and your fellow city dwellers will thank you for it, as it makes the city look cleaner; and no one wants to live in a place full of litter. But even if we throw it in the bin, even when the street sweeper takes it away, and our streets look nice, it's not the end.

Our cigarette butts. Our gum. Our plastic bags from our shopping. Our burger wrappers. They all go somewhere! They aren't like the animals droppings. They don't just wash away and return to nature, they stay, and stay, and stay, all around the world, just filling up giant holes in the ground.

*Litter is not about putting your rubbish in the bin,
although it helps the place look nice.
It's about what products are important,
what products you really need,
although you may not need them at all.*

*It's about choosing products that have no packaging.
It's about reviewing your lifestyle.
It's stopping rushing, it's about caring.
It's about thinking about something other than yourself.
It's about change.
Ultimately, it's not about litter at all.*

[Back to Index](#)

Loans

1. *The temporary provision of money (usually at interest)*

Why do you need a loan?

I need a loan because I need new car. I need a loan because I need a new extension. I need a loan because I need a new fridge. I need a loan because I want to buy a house. I need a loan because I need a holiday. I need a loan to pay off my credit cards. I need a loan to buy the boat I want. I need a loan to have a new carpet installed. I need a loan to pay for the last loan!

Borrowing money isn't a new thing. It has been around for many years. There's always someone desperate, and there's always someone willing to help (for a price). Of course, in the old days, the poor man trying to borrow money would be desperate – otherwise why would he need a loan? Desperation is why we borrow; or is it?

Am I desperate when I say I need a new car? Am I desperate, when I say I need a holiday? Am I even desperate when I need to buy a house or new furniture? This doesn't sound very desperate! Although I might agree that the man who has gambled, or bought drugs, and needs to borrow money to pay back his creditors, who have threatened him, is.

We borrow money because we are addicted to pleasure. New televisions, new sofas, new bathroom suites, new cars, new computers – all things that give pleasure; except we are not prepared to wait for them. We are not prepared to earn and save money, to wait until we can afford them. We want them now, something which would previously not have been possible for the average man, but companies are now making it easy to have what we cannot afford. Right now!

*Buy Now Pay Later!
Nothing to pay for the first 2 YEARS!
No deposit necessary!
Take it away today. No money required!*

So it's no wonder you can't help yourselves. Who wouldn't? It means you can have the pleasure right now, and it won't cost you a cent! Until the pleasure wears off and the reality hits that you now have to pay back every penny plus interest for the next three years – long after the initial pleasure has worn off.

How long does it take for the pleasure to wear off the purchase of a new sofa? I'd guess less than three years – maybe soon after the purchase. Then you begin to think: “What else can I buy?” “Oh, look, that new fridge is on sale, with nothing to pay for two years!” And so it starts again, the cycle of borrowing; for no other reason, than we want it. In effect we put off reality, to have pleasure today.

Buying a house is the one thing that most people are taught to aspire to. The ultimate dream; owning your own home, not paying a landlord any more rent, something that is truly yours for life. Something you can sell, something you can make money on. A wise investment – until you can't keep up the mortgage, because you lose your job, and get evicted.

As you all know already, you don't own the house, until you have paid back every penny of the loan plus all the interest. Something which normally takes at least twenty years.

You have to be pretty sure about it before signing the contract. No more freedom to do what you like, no more leaving when you want, no more making decisions on a whim. You are an adult now, and with that, comes responsibilities. BIG responsibilities. Not to the world, but to a bank. Of course, you can sell at any time, as long as you can pay back the loan; so you better hope your house is worth more than you paid for it.

On the face of it, buying property seems like a sensible way to borrow money. After all, you need somewhere to live, and you have enough income to meet your repayments. It's no one's business but yours. Right?

Let's move away from housing and go back to need, shall we? I think if we were all to be honest with ourselves, we would say we don't actually “need” to borrow money to buy consumer items. Hey, even if you don't have a sofa you don't actually “need” one, do you? What you mean is, “it would be nice,” after all, in some countries, it is actually cultural to sit on the floor, and by all accounts, better for your spine!

So why borrow? Why do we get sucked in by these companies? Well, it's because they know how to appeal to your inner desires; after all, that's what they are. They know you want something new, it's nice to have something new, and they want you to have it; after all it keeps them in business, and it's good for the economy.

The definition of a loan is “*the temporary provision of money,*” and if you have the income that allows you to borrow money at interest, and pay it back over two or five years then there is no problem. It's no one's business but yours. Right?

Imagine for a moment that you have never borrowed any money. How do you feel? Relieved? Happy?

Maybe, but I doubt it. In fact, most of us feel happy when we borrow money. Not at the prospect of having to pay it back, but that it enables us to buy the things we want, but cannot afford.

Not that people rush into borrowing money. Quite the opposite. Most people carefully consider their financial position, do endless calculations, but will ultimately conclude, that although things may be tight, it is actually financially viable to take out the loan.

Five days later the high definition plasma television with dvd recorder and surround sound is delivered

Wow! Look at it taking centre stage in your lounge, all shiny and bright, sound coming from every corner of the room. You can't wait to invite your friends round to watch a dvd.

“Wow!” says your friend. “Is that the new high definition plasma television with dvd recorder and surround sound that's just come out?”

“Sure is,” you reply with a wide smile.

Any thoughts of repayments here? Not on your life! “I've evaluated the financial situation and now I'm just going to enjoy it!” That is, until your friend gets the new sports car you've always wanted... “I wonder if I could afford that, maybe I could take out a loan...” and you start to forget about that glorious surround sound.

So if we don't actually need it, we don't really want it, and we are the most intelligent being on the planet; what could possibly make us sign up for a loan for three years with interest (*a fixed charge for borrowing money; usually a percentage of the amount borrowed*)? One word:

Status

1. The relative position or standing of things or especially persons in a society

A bigger house, a better car, a more expensive suit, a better holiday, a better computer, a better sofa. Let's face it, we never trade down do we?

In days gone by, we used to be able to distinguish someone's relative status in society by the type of clothes they wore. If you wore a top hat, or a cloth cap, if you had a horse and carriage or walked, or if you had a castle or a cottage.

It was evident to people on first meeting if you were of low status, and you stayed there, unless you made a lot of money. These days, it is harder to determine status, especially in the so called middle classes. We all dress similarly (driven by fashion), we generally all have cars and houses, and most of us have jobs. So how does the man, who earns thirty thousand per year, show he has a higher status than the man who earns twenty thousand per year? Certainly not in the street.

If I asked you to evaluate the status of two men in the street, who were both wearing the same jeans, t-shirt and shoes, could you do it? Maybe you could try to distinguish them, if one spoke with a more “educated” accent, but then again some people have made a lot of money without the need to have one. In today's society it would be difficult, so we have to use possessions as the indicator.

If I follow the two men, I would be looking to see what car they drove, or where they lived. Like it or not, the ownership of an expensive sports car would satisfy me that this man was of a higher status than the man getting into a fifteen year old car. But how does the man with the sports car distinguish his status from another man with the same make and model of car? He has a bigger house. And how does the man distinguish his status from another man with the same size house? He has more expensive furniture, and so on. Are you following this? We all have a need to show we are of a higher status than our peers.

You certainly wouldn't respect the position of the king or queen if they lived in a tiny council house would you? No, they live in a house bigger than anyone else's in the country, and that defines their relative status in society. This is not about what you know, or who you know, this is about showing what you've got. And if you want to be at the top, you have to have more possessions than anyone else in your status group.

I do not wish to start a discussion on why status is important here after all we are talking about loans!

Let's just say we like to impress people, and have a need to keep up with our peers. So it doesn't matter what level of wage earner you are, if your friends have the new wide screen satellite system you've got to have it too; better still, make it the high definition wide screen satellite system with dvd recorder and surround sound while you're at it.

But high definition wide screen satellite systems with dvd recorders and surround sound are expensive, aren't they? And after you pay your bills, and buy your food, you have little left with which to buy new items. So you borrow. Just to keep up with the neighbours next door. To impress your friends. You sign up for a two year loan which will make your life, just a little more difficult; but you don't care, this isn't about the money, remember! This is about status. After all, would you really need a new sports car, if no one looked at it?

"I buy these things just for me, no one else. I'm not a show off! I just like sports cars, so I bought one! Do you have a problem with that?"

Although we may desire these new possessions (because we like them, they make us happy, and we are addicted to pleasure), we still have to keep asking ourselves; "would I really, really want it, if no one commented on it?" After all, a sports car just gets you from a to b, the same as an older car; and a wide screen tv still shows the same tv programmes as the non-wide screen version.

But this is not about the possessions themselves; a tv is nothing, neither is a sports car, they are just pieces of carefully engineered plastic and metal. It is only when we allow them to become symbols of wealth that they take on significance. Let's face it, most of us are not or never will become extremely wealthy, but loans have enabled us to give the appearance of wealth.

I've had loans before, and I've bought cars, a small boat, tv's, and washing machines, all of them on credit, and I *definitely* didn't need them. I already had a car, and I certainly didn't need a boat! I had a tv, and I could have used the local laundrette for washing; but I didn't. I chose to get into debt; to make my life a little more difficult, so I could have the appearance of wealth, and gain a higher status position relative to my friends.

But it's not just people with no cash who borrow. The wealthy borrow too. Remember it doesn't just stop when you have all the possessions you want. Now that you're wealthy, you're going to want a better car, and a bigger house; your possessions are all relative to the status you want in society. The high definition wide screen satellite system with dvd recorder and surround sound might have worked when you were impressing your friends in the small, rented flat, but now all your friends have their own home cinemas! So what do you do? You carefully consider your financial position, do endless calculations, but ultimately conclude, that although things may be tight, it is actually financially viable to take out the loan!

Loan companies are not stupid, they know why you borrow, and they are making billions out of each and every one of us who are desperate to improve our status within society. Why can't we be happy with what we have? Well, that is a question that should be addressed in another topic, as should housing. Let's just say that the loan itself is not the problem, it's why we want it that should concern us all.

This is a never ending cycle – once you're on it, you can't stop: until you finally realise that the ultimate reason for having something you have no money to pay for is *status*, and the cost is debt, and perpetual discontent.

[Back to Index](#)

Love

1. *A strong positive emotion of regard and affection*
2. *Any object of warm affection or devotion*
3. *A beloved person; used as terms of endearment*
4. *A deep feeling of sexual desire and attraction*
5. *Sexual activities (often including sexual intercourse) between two people*

We all know what it is to love, right? Even the most violent amongst us has loved someone in his life. Perhaps his mother, or father, or a partner. When we fall in love something magical happens doesn't it? We can't think straight (a good thing), and our whole being feels giddy. We just can't focus on our work and any tasks we have to do seem like frivolous distractions compared with being in love. It uses up all of our energy, but it requires no effort. We don't suddenly decide to be in love, when it happens it happens. No one can explain it. Sometimes the feeling lasts a lifetime sometimes just a couple of months but it is an experience we can never forget.

I have always told my girlfriends at some point that I love them (it's something you say to make a girl feel good, right?), but without fail, the love seems to wane, and the gritty business of just being in a relationship takes over. We all have bills to worry about, our careers, our own problems, and pretty much everything else.

Life gets in the way doesn't it? All you want to be is in love, but circumstances won't let you just "be," and soon the intense emotions (*any strong feeling*) start to fade, and all you are left with is the mundane stuff. "I think we should split up" one of you says, and that's the end of love!

Funnily enough, when partners stop being together, other emotions kick in like hate, or at the very least, dislike. I have never understood how I can go from feeling all the love chemicals rushing around my body to having no feelings for them at all. Love seems to be such a temporary thing.

"You have to take care of love" one of my girlfriends once said to me. I never really knew what she meant, but I think what she was getting at was that I should spend more time with her, just her, and pay her some attention, but what do I know? We split up soon after that.

So what thought waves or chemicals are passed invisibly between two people to create this intense emotion we call love, which is, after all, only a man-made word? Perhaps it is just a biological process that takes place to ensure the pair bond is complete and that procreation will take place. But it "feels" like something a lot more than that doesn't it?

When you look into somebody's eyes (the window to the soul, someone once said to me) you can feel this intense connection, a connection that has nothing to do with words.

What is it that attracts us to each other in the first place, they say that opposites attract, but what is doing the attracting? Is it a silent chemical connection, or are waves being transmitted across the air? What do you feel like when you catch someone's eye across a room, and they catch yours? What is connecting you? Would you feel the same way if you hadn't held each others stare?

The eyes are indeed a window, not to the soul, but to the mind. For in effect it is the mind doing the seeing, the eyes just channel the light. And when you look into someone's eyes for long enough, it's like you are reading their mind. Actually, you are; and they are reading yours. Not consciously of course, but more telepathically (*communicating without apparent physical signals*). How else can you explain this thing called love?

My love for her

It's strange the people you end up with. I didn't even like her in the beginning, but the more we talked, the more our minds came closer together and we started communicating without words. I remember the first night I kissed her, we spent what seemed like an eternity looking into each others eyes. She on the top bunk of the hostel, and me standing looking at her. Suddenly it was as though there was a rush of chemicals running around my body, not in the way you have before sex, it only happened when I looked in her eyes.

And that's the thing isn't it? The difference between love and lust. With lust you look at the body and with love you look deep, deep into the eyes. Then I kissed her.

From that moment, I was in love. I mean really in love, I couldn't stand to be away from her, but as time went on, and bills, and day to day stuff got in the way, it just turned into, can't stand her. I couldn't understand how I was losing all the feelings of love for her, to be replaced with just a mild annoyance at her presence. In the end we split up. We said we still "loved" each other, but living together was just too hard. And so I left.

I thought long and hard about where it had gone wrong but I realised that the original love had never really died. It had been awakened, and couldn't die. This love was not a process of the mind, it couldn't be, the mind is governed by thought. This love had been crushed by the society we chose to live in and through our actions, we had driven each other apart.

Have you ever noticed that if you are having relationship problems, having a holiday together seems to rekindle the love, only to have it dashed onto the rocks when you return home? Why do you think that is? People say that the holiday was not real life, that real life was back in the house with all the bills, but think about this with me for a moment; what is more real, two people who can be just with each other with no pressure or a society which forces people to constantly compete? Unfortunately so many relationships are ruined by the creation of this fast moving individualistic society.

I don't know if man and woman are supposed to stay together forever, from a biological point of view. I know that the church led creation of marriage is purely artificial. But if you find someone you love why can't you be with them? "Outside pressures" is often cited as a reason for relationships breaking down, but surely we can create a life without these pressures?

I realised some time ago I still loved the girl whose eyes I had looked into, but I knew because of "outside pressures" we would never be together again. But the bond is still there. You can never break something that deep. Whatever we would like to think.

I want to move away from relationships for now, as I think that there is possibly something more to this love than "meets the eye" (excuse the pun). What I really want to discuss with you is love at a different level. What I mean is love that cannot be divided even by "outside pressures." A love that bonds us all. A love that is created along with every particle in the universe. But I don't know what it is or if it exists. I think it does. I feel that love for another individual is just one level – that there is something deeper. Maybe I am wrong, but I would like to explore it with you nonetheless in the form of a dialogue withself. Let us start.

A dialogue with love

- Me:** Now, I know I have called you "love," but it is just a dialogue with myself. Is that right?
- Love:** You would be correct!
- Me:** So I'm just going to throw this question out there; is there something deeper than love for another person?
- Love:** Do you want there to be?
- Me:** Well, it would be nice, but I have just been thinking that this love shouldn't be divided into just one man one woman that somewhere there is a love for all.
- Love:** Do you love all?
- Me:** Well, not in that way.
- Love:** What way?
- Me:** Well you know looking into someone's eyes and kissing them and making love to them.
- Love:** Do you think you need to look into someone's eyes and kiss them to love them?
- Me:** Well, no, well, yes, I guess so, how else do you love?
- Love:** (SILENCE)
- Me:** Ok I get it. I don't need to look into someone's eyes, but how will I know if I love them if I don't get the butterflies in my stomach!
- Love:** That is just a physical sensation, it has nothing to do with love.
- Me:** Oh, Ok. Erm, so how can I love everyone else then, it's probably a good thing to do.
- Love:** Do you have to know? There isn't a method.
- Me:** Well I don't know how to do it. I want to love every being on this planet but I don't want to have to kiss them all.
- Love:** This is no time for jokes. You say you want to love every being, does that include all the animals and plants and trees?

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Me: Yes I guess it does.
Love: You do already.
Me: Do I? Great. But it doesn't feel like it.
Love: Like what?
Me: You know, what love is supposed to feel like.
Love: We are mixing up two things here, physical attraction to enable procreation, and love which has nothing to do with physical attraction.
Me: I see. So what does it have to do with?
Love: (silence)
Me: Look, how can I already love everyone and everything? I haven't had time to think about it yet!
Love: Exactly. You do not need thought it just gets in the way.
Me: Ah, so love is always present but thought stops it somehow?
Love: (silence)
Me: So if I stop thinking I can love?
Love: You are love.
Me: How?
Love: Because you exist.
Me: What? I don't understand. How can it be that simple, don't we have to make a decision to love?
Love: Decision is thought.
Me: Ok, So say I accept your (my) advice and I agree I am love how does that help me, how does that help the world?
Love: You are not trying to force everyone to be love, you are saying that you are love. That is all, when people see that they too are love the world will help itself.
Me: Ah, so everyone needs to see this individually there's no point in me telling everyone.
Love: Why would you, it is not the truth.
Me: Wait but you said everything was love, if that's the case why can't I tell people and maybe they would wake up?
Love: It is not truth.
Me: Ok, but how long do we have to wait until everyone discovers that they are love?
Love: As long as it takes.
Me: But should we just stand around and watch while people kill each other?
Love: If that is how they will learn, yes.
Me: It sounds all a bit uncompassionate to me.
Love: But can you see, love is universal, that is, it is part of everything that exists.
Me: So why can't the scientists see it?
Love: Because scientists see with their eyes.
Me: Ok I am love, it is universal, now what?
Love: Now nothing.
Me: Is that it?
Love: I guess so, is there anything else?
Me: But I don't understand, it can't be that simple.
Love: But it is.

How can love for all mankind be that simple? I just can't understand it. Maybe I didn't ask the right questions, maybe I misunderstood, maybe I wasn't listening, but who was talking? Me!

Me: Look, I'm not happy with the answer. I want to know more.
Love: Stop resisting.
Me: Resisting what?
Love: Stop resisting what is.
Me: What? How can I if I don't know what you're talking about.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Love: You are resisting truth, you are resisting what *you* know to be true.
Me: Am I, am I the resistance that is stopping love?
Love: You are.
Me: So how do I stop resisting?
Love: By stopping resisting!
Me: How?
Love: Let go. And be love, it is everywhere in you.
Me: Ok.

So perhaps I am right, maybe resistance is what's stopping us all from loving, not in the sexual way, that is biological, but universally.

And you don't need to say I am love. Because If I am already then why mention it? That is merely division.

But if love is universal, and we are all part of the whole, then surely compassion is the same. But wait a minute I have spent this whole book splitting love and compassion into two separate words. And I know why. Because humans have divided them, they have created separation in everything. Why am I surprised that they have divided compassion and love?

But I thought love was “*a strong positive emotion of regard and affection,*” and compassion was “*the humane quality of understanding the suffering of others and wanting to do something about it,*” but I must forget the dictionary definitions and focus on the whole. That is me. I am the whole. I better have a quick dialogue and check!

The end of division

Me: Hi there, me again. Look, I've just had this bit of insight and I wanted to run it past you.
Love: Go on.
Me: I think that love and compassion are the same, I think we have divided them just as we do with everything.
Love: Go on.
Me: Well, love is a man-made word which describes feelings for another, and I know I am love, part of the whole. And if I love someone, then I must be compassionate at the same time.
Love: I see.
Me: So if I am, love I am compassion, there is no division. There cannot be one without the other. So why have I spent a thousand pages dividing them?
Love: Because insight is a process.
Me: But should I go back and change them?
Love: Why would you? You can't tell anyone truth. You have to find it out for yourself and even if people understand what you are saying it doesn't mean that they are going to get the same flash of insight you did.
Me: Well I am happy.
Love: Why?
Me: Because I can now see how I am still dividing everything, even towards the end of this book!
Love: You are human, and humans love to divide.
Me: No more: I divide nothing. I am indivisible.
Love: Are you sure?
Me: Absolutely. Although there can be no absolutes can there?
Love: Why?
Me: Because it implies an end, a conclusion when there can be none, just movement.
Love: So who are you, love, or compassion? Or both?
Me: Neither. I am, that is all.
Love: You're learning.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

There is nothing left to say, I cannot tell you you are love, or that love and compassion have been divided by man, that there is no one without the other, I can only leave you these words and wish you luck on your own journey.

[Back to Index](#)

M

Manufacturing

1. *Put together out of components or parts*

Some people are always complaining about the terrible things companies (large and small) are doing to the planet, and at one time I used to join in with them – until I started to consider my modern life. I would like to believe that I have given up the trappings of the western lifestyle, but that is blatantly untrue.

So, ok, I don't have a mobile phone anymore, but I live in modern dwellings wherever I am in the world. I still have a car, although I don't use it often. I occasionally buy cd's of artists I like. I use the internet. I have a laptop. I wear modern clothes. I like fashionable shoes. I enjoy doing winter sports from time to time. I have a snowboard, a kiteboard, and a landboard which all hook up via a harness to a power kite. I have special winter clothes. I like to buy dried soya products. I still buy various things I “need” from retail shops. I take the plane. I take the train. I walk on the roads. I go to a cafe from time to time. I use the telephone. I go to the cinema. Need I go on? I am still a modern western consumer whether I like it or not!

I wrote in other topics that at one point, I was living on an island at a buddhist retreat, which sounds as far away from modern life as one could be, but that wasn't the case at all! They shipped in their food via a boat driven by petrol from a local retailer who in turn bought their products from wholesalers, who bought from distributors or growers worldwide, and the food was shipped via plane or ship from all four corners of the world!

The food was then transported up to the purpose built centre made of concrete, bricks, with wooden doors and double glazed windows in plastic wheelbarrows, where it was stored in nice shiny fridges and freezers, and then prepared on plastic chopping boards on aluminium benches and then cooked in aluminium pots on a nice stove (gas powered), and served on china plates and eaten with stainless steel knives and forks, before being washed in a sink with water heated by immersion heaters and sometimes solar panels, scrubbed clean using cloths and washing up liquid before being dried by cotton dishcloths! And that's just the start of it!

Modern porcelain toilets and basins, cotton towels, bed sheets and pillows. Modern beds, desks, lighting, power showers, meditation cushions, candles, incense, and even statues of the buddha! All made by manufacturing companies somewhere in the world.

I think it is of the utmost importance we do not fool ourselves, or attempt to fool others into thinking we are free of the trappings of modern life. We are not. Everything we have and use (with some small exceptions) is manufactured on a production line.

Before you offer various handmade items for exhibit, please think about this. The man who makes the handmade table you have in your kitchen probably didn't whittle it from a tree in a forest! More likely he bought the wood pre-cut from a wood supplier, and then started to make the table (oh, using tools made by tool making companies) which was glued or nailed using the modern items (glue or nails), manufactured by a company somewhere!

And if you look around your house – go on, have a look now – you will notice that everything you have has been made by someone else. The taps you turn on, the shower you step into, the shower gel, the soap, the toothpaste, the toothbrush, the fire to keep you warm at night, the central heating, the light bulbs, the telephone, the tv, the dvd player...As you can see, we could probably fill up this whole book with items we buy, but that would be a waste of paper!

I used to feel terrible that I was buying so many items, but we mustn't feel too bad about all this. There is nothing wrong with buying or using products made by manufacturers. Far from it. I'd like to see us all trying to start from scratch to make tools and products. None of us have the skills to make everything we need, let alone things we desire. That is the modern life we live in.

Specialisation has enabled us to become really good at one thing, and if everyone were generalists we would not have seen the technological improvements we have today. So we really owe a debt of thanks to all those brains who have started companies to design and build products that have made our life easier and more comfortable. You don't have to go back very far in time to imagine what life would have been like without the things that make it possible to spend our days working as marketing executives and stockbrokers!

So what's the problem?

On the surface, nothing. We could very well end this topic now by congratulating ourselves on a job well done. Companies make the stuff we want. We buy it. People are kept in work. Money is generated, money is spent. Perfect. Well almost, if it weren't for the fact that the whole process is building up momentum, until now, the happiness and success of everyone depends on us making and buying more and more stuff, whatever the cost.

You see, the raw ingredients have to come from somewhere, and so does the energy required to turn them into something saleable. We are using up more and more of the planets resources, and we are literally digging the planet up to have things which make us comfortable. Think about it carefully for a moment will you.

Have you ever considered where the table you sit at, the computers you use or the tv you watch comes from? You cannot make something out of nothing you know! The more money we earn, the more stuff we want. Our appetites are insatiable. It has become a dangerous sickness of modern times.

Not only do we buy a computer, but next year a new product comes out to replace the one we have. "It's so old," we say, "we need to get a new one." The same goes for cars and sofas, and tv's. We must have the most up to date stuff. We must!

In fact, if we didn't keep buying the most up to date products, and replacing our "old" stuff, manufacturers would quickly go out of business, jobs would be lost, the economy would come to a standstill, and from the government's point of view that would be a disastrous state of affairs. Unemployed people tend to be unhappy people, and unhappy people don't vote for a government they believe has "failed" them!

So it looks as though we are stuck in this never ending cycle of manufacture and purchasing. If it stops, who knows what would happen to the world we live in. Unfortunately, the situation is so grave that we should be asking ourselves what will happen to the world we live in if we continue the way we are going? Or, how long have we got before the resources eventually run out? And what will happen to my happiness once no one is making new stuff I can buy? We need to consider this carefully.

Goods are churned out by the millions every year, most of them not designed to last, but priced to sell, and the manufacturers know very well we will have to replace them, not only if they break down, but when they "go out of fashion." After all, who wants old stuff?

The problem lies in that very fact that most things are designed to be in fashion for only a short period of time. The textile industry is testament to that. And what do we do when things no longer suit us? We toss them away, sometimes in a skip at the local refuse collection point, and sometimes in the recycle bin, thinking we are doing a good thing by recycling, then the next day buying new stuff. It seems to me we are stuck in a loop with no way out! What do you think?

Manufacturers, driven by profit, powered by advertising, supported by us, and the government, are literally eating our home away by using up all the resources – which believe it or not – are in short supply. We have one home, earth, and the only way we can slow this process of "erosion" down is to stop buying new stuff all the time. Can't you see?

Our psychological desire for more and more shiny new things is costing us the earth! We are so trapped into making ourselves superficially happy, that all we will end up with is a rock floating in space that resembles a waste disposal site.

So what can be done?

Businesses don't want to stop. The people who work there don't want to stop. The governments don't want them to stop, and you and I definitely don't want them to stop. We're all too comfortable on this merry-go-round. And anyway, why would you listen to me? I have already told you that I too am bound to this modern way of living. It is hard to give up, "and why should we?" you ask. Well, first of all, if you can't see why, then you'll never give it up!

Over the last couple of years I have gradually begun a process of what I like to call "unburdening" my life. I still live in a modern western society, I have not closed my life off to it, after all, we are all in this together, east and west, rich and poor, but I have begun to realise that all the goods in the world cannot make me anymore than just superficially happy. So I have just got rid of them. Not to go and live in a cave

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

somewhere, but to live as me, not me plus everything I desire. Do you follow what I am trying to say here?

I was born into the world as a naked member of homo sapiens (you know, the species you and I belong to?), and I will die as I came into this world. I want to experience life as it is, not through game machines, tv's, new sofas, and the constant remodelling of my house.

I appreciate that there are items that one needs in life to make us comfortable, but these manufactured goods are not who we are. Of course, we can impress our friends and family with these items, but that is pure ego and status, both of which are irrelevant bolt-ons. I understand the attachment you have to these items, that's why it need only start slowly; but in order to see the world more clearly we must start to unburden ourselves of these worthless goods.

I am not for one minute suggesting that you become an ascetic (*someone who practices self-denial as a spiritual discipline*), and wander the globe with only the shirt on your back, but isn't it time we used this big brain of ours for something more than desire of material possessions? Even if you don't care about digging up our one home and polluting our fragile atmosphere with toxic gases, then do something selfish for yourselves.

See what you could be missing behind the veil of constant consumer purchases and try to imagine what your life, and what your families life could be like, if only you were to change your thinking just one degree. Over time, one degree of change can put a ship many miles from it's destination. Imagine if you were that ship. Where would you end up? Isn't it time to let go of the attachment to mass marketed, mass produced goods and take a good look inside the box? Your box. Your brain!

Go on, I dare you!

[Back to Index](#)

Markets

1. *The world of commercial activity where goods and services are bought and sold*
2. *A marketplace where groceries are sold*

In this time of globalisation, where the word “market” means the entire world, wouldn't it be nice to take a trip down memory lane to a time when life was simpler, to a time when you could stroll between different stalls selling all sorts of produce, crafts, and hand-made products at your leisure without shop assistants shouting: “Are you all right there? Do you *need* any help? Ok, if there's something you *need*, just let me know.”

I don't know about you but there's something about the shops these days that make me not want to go in! They all seem to be the same. On each high street there's five mobile phone shops, twenty fashion stores (all part of a chain), four mini-supermarkets, a spattering of estate agents, and maybe the odd computer store. Each shop is ambiently heated to either way too cold or way too hot, and upon entering you will be greeted by either excessively loud music or “shop fm” where the stores have a pretend radio station welcoming you to a world of bargains. At least in the uk we are saved from “spruikers” (common in australia), who stand outside the shop with a microphone and an amplifier, trying to tempt you in to the store.

Each store has a million different products, it doesn't matter if they are selling shampoo or tv's. The choice is endless. Rows upon rows of heavily packaged – usually imported - products, and advertising banners hung everywhere to point us to this weeks bargains.

I have to admit, I did use to like it. It was all quite exciting going out on a saturday with all my hard earned money ready for a spending spree, heading out in the car to the big shopping centre where I could comfortably park my car inside and shop in style without getting a single drop of rain on me!

As I walked into the centre I would be enchanted by the shiny floors (apparently created like that so you don't have to look down to watch where you put your feet, and can concentrate on looking at the shops), and the bright twinkling lights. So many shops to look at, so much stuff to buy. I used to travel back to my car with my arms laden with goodies, filled to the brim with tasty burgers, chips and cola, impatient to get home so I could unwrap everything and get out in the evening to show off all the new clothes I had bought.

But this topic isn't about consumerism, or buying things you don't need just because they are there and you've got your credit card. What I want to talk to you about today is the lost connection between the community and local producers.

With the demise of local markets and locally owned shops, and the rise of mega shopping stores, where each product is individually packaged and “sealed for quality and security” the local businesses have found themselves on the outside of a new globally controlled market, and subsequently, out of business.

Many of you may argue that if the public don't want the markets and the local shops, then they should be left to disappear and replaced with something they do want. But do the public – that's you and me – really want these shopping centres? Isn't it because we have become lazy, because we don't want to have to walk more than ten feet in order to buy the goods we want, and only if we can drive there? Think about it. We say we are so busy that we need these types of stores, but we didn't have them before, and was life so terrible?

“What?” says you. “The service was appalling, the shops were never open when you wanted them, and even when they were, they had a terrible range of products to choose from, and they weren't cheap. Now we have shops open almost 24 hours a day, they look nice, they smell nice, they are cheap, the staff are friendly, there is a huge range of products and they are pretty cheap. There's no competition.”

Do you agree? Has the era of the local trader died? Are locally produced products no longer wanted? Let me ask you another question. Would you prefer to buy lettuce which has been grown organically in a field two miles away from the stall, or would you prefer to buy it in a massive supermarket where it has made a journey of several thousand miles, and may have been washed in a country where water resources are already scarce?

When you look at products on the shelf, like salad, have a look at the country of origin, you may find it originated in africa. Don't you think it is sad that we are buying products we can grow in our back gardens, or greenhouses, and people in adjacent countries to the lettuce's country of origin are starving? Then they ship the food to a country that doesn't *need* their produce? In fact, the only reason we buy it is because it's cheaper than local produce, or available out of season.

In many towns and cities around the world, the market is still the main place for trade. You can buy anything there, not just fruit and veg. Locally made furniture, rugs, clothing, and items for the home (although you do have to check that the products are local, not just imported from china, and resold on a

market stall). There are so many different products sold, and if you have ever been to any of the big market cities in the world you can feel the vibrancy of it.

It is alive with people bargaining. 180, no 150, no! Ok, 120. Sold! It is fast moving, the goods don't stay on the shelves for months at a time. There is the added bonus of being able to deal with real people, not staff who are trained to behave and talk exactly as the corporation wishes them too. These are people who say what they want, and do what they want. You may not like them, because they do not show you the same "respect" that you get in your fancy shops, but that "respect" is false. It's an illusion, created by the companies to make you believe the shop assistant is really interested in you. In reality what they are interested in is finishing for the night!

Shopping at markets and small local stores may take longer than your average mega-super-mart but it is supposed to, it is a different kind of experience, and the people are different. Try a local store again and give them support, or better still, start your own; but if your main motivation is to be in the top 500 rich list in the uk, please think again. Local business, and especially market business, is community based. It is a place where real people use real skills to make the products. You may not value this skill, but in an era where everything is made by machine, isn't it nice to have something hand-made? Let me tell you a story.

I was shopping with some friends at a local market once when I noticed a perfume stall; the lady introduced herself, and asked us if we would like to try some perfumes and aftershaves she had made herself. One smelled beautiful, and I asked my friend if she was going to buy it. "No." she said, "I'm not paying that much for a 'non-label' perfume," and anyway, it doesn't even come in a box!" Right there. Right then, I noticed it. Not only did she not trust the product because it didn't come in an attractive gift box, but because it wasn't some big name brand, she wasn't prepared to pay for the woman's time and effort to produce it.

I then realised that shopping at these big stores had little to do with convenience and price, it was a status thing. People actually liked to be seen carrying the bags from the designer stores, so that others could see that they had not only been in there, but had purchased something! That's why they wouldn't buy a hand made product from a market – it didn't come with a label. Who would be impressed by the product they had bought? No one. And shopping these days is more about the bag than the actual item it contains.

We like to buy into the illusion of the stores with the shiny floors, ambient music, respectful staff, and glossy bags. We actually like it. That's why we don't buy at the local stores anymore. They have not invested in special flooring, lighting, and advanced sales techniques for their staff. The shops aren't painted in the latest fashionable colours to tempt us. They just do what they say they do. They sell things.

Last year, I went into a local hardware supplier on the west coast of Ireland. I could not believe my eyes. There was stuff everywhere. I couldn't walk through the aisles without tripping over something. They had a lot of products, but it wasn't the same as walking in to one of the chain stores. There, the products would be organised according to type, big signs overhead pointing you to the correct area, no mess, only shiny floors! I realised that it was *that* I liked. I had become so accustomed to shopping in the large corporate stores that I now disliked the local stores because they failed to conform to the idea of what a store should look like. I was almost about to walk out, when an older man, presumably the owner stopped me, and said, "can I help you with anything?" I told him I was looking for a bicycle lock and with that he said "Give me a second, I'll just get you one."

In my haste to find the product I was looking for, pay and leave without speaking to anyone, I forgot that there is still something that exists which is called "customer service." Not the "trained" staff in the big stores, but people who were genuinely interested in you and what your requirements were.

"This is real shopping," I thought to myself. We have become so used to not talking to strangers (just in case) that any interaction on a level deeper than "that's £34.50, cash or credit card?" seems intrusive! That's why these big stores work. You don't have to talk to anyone. No one engages you in any conversation, but *that* is what we are missing in this clinical modern life.

You may remember tv programmes, where you'd see old ladies go down to the local shop for a chin wag with the owner – the purchase of the goods being almost secondary... No? Well apparently it used to happen in real life too; and it wasn't just old people, young people did too! They actually knew the people in the local store, or the market stall, because guess what? The people working there were part of the community. They lived in the town, unlike today where everyone commutes and is from somewhere else.

No wonder we don't like talking to people. They are strangers. They are not from the surrounding area, and we have nothing in common with them, that's why we like to shop as quickly as possible and get out

without having to talk. Do you see? Is that clear to you?

So what can we do about it? Do we want to do anything about it? I do. I would like to see local products that have been made with local skills back in our homes. No more flat pack wardrobes from half way around the world. A real wardrobe – you may have to save up for – made from sustainable forest wood, which won't start falling to bits in a couple of years. I would like to see local produce being sold at markets again, and people prepared to pay the correct price for these items, even though they don't come in a shiny bag. I would like to see, real local stores, selling goods that local people want. That *doesn't* mean the stores don't have to look nice or smell nice either; just because it is a local store won't make it attract people, it has to compete with the chain stores.

And finally, we have to shift our minds about what shopping really is. Is it a necessary activity to buy things we need or want, or is it a leisure activity all on its own? This addiction to shopping is not one of the greatest achievements of the human race, and all it does is use resources we can barely afford to waste.

Local shopping and markets cut down on the amount of road and air miles product has had to travel, which reduces the amount of carbon that is emitted into the atmosphere. Because it is made locally, it does not require the volume of packaging necessary to keep it intact, thereby reducing packaging, which reduces the amount of trees that need to be cut down, and the amount of plastic (which comes from petrochemicals, which come from oil) that needs to be used. Buying locally made products support the local community, because you are supporting local employment which local people spend in their local community! Is this making any sense to you at all?

Buying local is good for the environment, good for local business, good for the community, and ultimately good for you and me. Let's give it a go. We've got nothing to lose and everything to gain.

[Back to Index](#)

Marriage

1. *The state of being a married couple voluntarily joined for life (or until divorce)*

Of all the things we conform to in society, marriage is perhaps the most serious, in that it is actually a legal contract we enter into. A contract that is recognised by all the courts in the land. Given that the statistics show nearly two out three marriages fail these days, I thought we should explore this deeply. Why do people get married? Why do they divorce? Do we actually know what marriage is?

Story one

I got married in 2003, to a woman I loved very much. We were married in England in a registry office, not the church. Both of us were not really interested in getting married although we were in love and wanted to be together. The thing was, our visas for our respective countries (Australia and Britain) were running out, and soon we wouldn't be able to be together in the same country – so we came up with the only solution we could.

My wife was anti the whole idea, and I was unsure as to what the significance of it was, although I was sure it was something my parents wanted me to do. It was seen by both our parents as achieving respectability (*honourableness by virtue of being respectable and having a good reputation*) as we would then fit nicely into society, as another married couple, ready to embark on a life which would produce grandchildren and continue the family names (and genes).

The ceremony was carried out at a council office, presided over by a council employee who had the authority to conduct marriage ceremonies. The one thing I noticed as we went in was a distinct lack of ceremony, although it was formal – in the sense of signing the papers for a new house. We were asked to state our wish to be joined together in marriage, but vows resembling any kind of emotion were deemed optional. We chose the standard vow, number one, and five or ten minutes later, we were pronounced man and wife. I can't remember if I was asked to “kiss the bride,” but very quickly we had to sign the formal papers. The contract was complete.

We left feeling very unmarried, save the reasonably cheap rings we had bought for each other. There were no guests except my parents as the two witnesses, (because we were travelling all over the world and my wife's family were in Australia), and there was no drunken party. In fact, apart from a nice lunch and an evening in a farmhouse bed and breakfast, it could have been any other day. We split up one year ago.

Story two

One of my best friends got married the year before we did. She and her boyfriend were very much in love and they got married for a very different reason. Neither of them had to worry about visas even though he was from New Zealand and she was from Australia. They were very much *for* the idea of marriage. They saw it as something exciting where they would be embarking on a new life together. They were happy to conform. In fact they didn't see it as conforming, more a natural step in their relationship. Something they saw as evolutionary in their partnership.

Their parents were overjoyed, and a lavish wedding ceremony was arranged costing several thousand Australian dollars. Guests were invited from New Zealand. The reception was organised. The church was booked. The band was hired. The menu was discussed. The caterers arranged. The dress was made. Suits were hired. The photographer was booked. Hairstyles were discussed. Everything was organised. Bridesmaids were selected. The best man was nominated. The wedding cake was made. Flowers were arranged.

The big day came, and although I wasn't able to be present as we were travelling at the time, we sent flowers for the bride. By all accounts it was a wonderful day. The bride was beautiful, the groom handsome. Everyone looked just perfect in the photos. The couple's parents looked so proud. It was the happiest day of their life. They split up one year before we did.

Two very different stories. Two very different reasons for marriage. Two identical endings.

Let's go back in time shall we? Back to the time when marriage actually meant something. A time when "death do us part" actually meant what it said (I am using a christian marriage as an example but this topic applies to marriages within any religion). Back to a time when couples stayed together "for better or for worse."

The idea of divorce may have crossed a woman's mind, but she would rarely carry it through for fear of the humiliation it would bring on her and her family. Women put up with years of physical and emotional abuse from their husbands because, back then, most women had no other place to go. A woman's place was in the home. She was subservient (*abjectly submissive; characteristic of a slave or servant*) to the needs of her husband. She quietly brought up the children and looked after the house. The man's role (as it was seen then), was to go to work to provide for his family.

Women typically didn't work outside the home, so they had no independent income of their own; hence leaving could not be described as a realistic option. It didn't matter if the husband was unfaithful, a drunkard, a liar, violent or cruel, women saw it as their duty to remain in the home. And outwardly at least, they were fiercely loyal to their husbands.

To understand this mindset we have to think of the role the church has played. Until recently, marriage was conducted exclusively by priests in the church, and girls were "given" away by their fathers (can you understand the word "given?" How can you give another human being to someone?) And women promised to "love, honour and obey."

This is a clear example of the patriarchal (*characteristic of a form of social organization in which the male is the family head and title is traced through the male line*) society. Where the male is the dominant sex, and the female is subservient. It disgusts me that men have conspired over thousands of years to dominate and rule women for so long. All blessed by the church.

We shouldn't be surprised at this, after all the church is still an all male affair, no matter what they say in public relations statements about embracing the role of women in the church. Men are the most powerful of the human species, physically at least, and have always thought of themselves as above women, spiritually and socially. As far as men were concerned, women were here to look after the house, bear children and be happy with their lot, which for most women was being polite and respectful to their husbands (who were obviously superior). So women had it pretty tough back then, and in a lot of countries they still do.

Men seem to be delusional at times in their opinions of themselves. They actually believe they are superior to women; just because they have more muscle power, and many countries, women are treated with no respect from their husbands, are physically beaten and psychologically tormented. In fact it almost seems to be an accepted part of the culture.

Some women are forced to hide their faces (and sometimes their whole bodies), not speak to other men, and be available at all times for their husbands. This seems to be done under the guise of religious practice, but in reality, it is just another way for men to exert their absolute and total control over women, who in case anyone forgets, are equal members of the human race, and individuals who must be treated with love and compassion.

It amazes me that some men actually still believe in their superiority. It makes me almost angry with sadness to see such a lack of awareness on their part that they cannot see they are (a) deluding themselves as to some imagined status and (b) hurting another human being they supposedly love.

How can you think you are above someone who you love? Love is openness, understanding, sharing. Compare that to dominance, control and violence, and you will see that a man who believes that just because the law gave him the right to "marry," he can do what ever he wants with his wife, just like a child tosses around a rag doll. He is "married" so he can turn his inner weakness on someone who is legally "his," or so he believes.

Thanks to women entering the workforce in larger numbers (amongst other things), the tables have at last been turned on these patriarchal bullies. Women have finally gained their financial independence which allows them the ability to leave relationships, without fear of having to rely on others, who may judge them as being an unfit wife. It is amazing that people can have such idiotic prejudices. What is an unfit wife? People are people, and if they are not getting on, it is best to part – even if they have children.

Marriage is not for life. That is dogma, that is religion. Male control and dominance. Marriage is just another illusion created by powerful men to enslave women. Maybe this seems strange coming from a man,

but when you become aware of what it is to be married you will start to see what I mean.

Some people think that divorce is too easy. “Life means life,” but that is a naive and unrealistic view of the world. Divorce is not “further evidence of a break down in morals and family values.” If you believe that, you must question where your ideas come from. More often than not you will be a churchgoer, and a strong believer in the word of god. You will not have come to this conclusion by any rational thought.

If you are not able to reconcile your differences, please move on. Leave. Be on your own, find a new partner, because two people who were in love and are no longer in love can create some very negative energy – energy that is not only unhealthy for their own minds, but can also affect others around them, including family, friends, work colleagues and of course, children.

But before you do that, try to find out what is going wrong. Maybe it is just part of a natural cycle that will even out in due course. Maybe you need to get some outside assistance to help you work out your problems, or maybe you could even try to talk to each other *before* the tension starts building between you. Both of you need to become more aware of yourselves in action. Try to see the other person’s point of view, before you start the inevitable meltdown into constant bickering and arguing. The world has too much sorrow and pain in it already, don't add even more hurt to the world by hurting someone you love.

In sorting it out, talk a little, but hug a lot! When you hug someone you pass warmth and energy to them and vice versa. Instead of beginning the argument, try to hug each other first. Hold each other tight, and don't speak. Let the moment be silence. Experience the moment without interacting with it, and when you have finished your hug just stand back for a moment and try to start an argument. You'll find it much, much more difficult, I guarantee you that. Try to remember what it was you wanted to say, then, approaching the situation with tenderness, speak softly and kindly, even if it is something that has made you mad. Remember to treat this person the way you want to be treated.

If this doesn't work by all means go back to screaming and shouting and throwing things. Why not go the whole way and become violent as well? Because I can guarantee that whatever it is you are arguing about is not that important, although at the time you may think it is. Talk, then let it go. Don't keep it in your mind. You need to let your husband or wife know how you feel, agree upon a way forward, and let it go. Don't let things build up though that just makes them worse.

Sorry I got carried away! Who am I to give you advice about your marriage? At the end of the day, if you know what it is to love, and you feel connected to the other person in love, you will stay together, whether you have a little piece of paper or not. If you don't feel the connection, do yourselves a favour and split up. All marriage is, is a piece of paper that joins you in a contract. It's not meaningless, because contracts are enforceable by law, but it is not a love contract.

“You're just saying that because your marriage failed. Don't try to spoil it for the rest of us.” say some of you.

Am I? Think about what being with someone actually means to you. What does being married actually mean to you? For a man, one would hope that the reason he got married is not to make sure his girlfriend was off limits to other males hot in pursuit, although as a male I know it can cross your mind from time to time. Perhaps you are worried your girlfriend will run off with another guy, so you propose to her. Make her legally yours. No one can take her away. She is your possession. Until she decides to leave you.

You can't stop her. She is an independent human being whatever your legal piece of paper says. Marriage is two people in love, living together, having children (perhaps) and enjoying and sharing life's great adventure with each other. Can someone tell me why two human beings who are in love with each other need a contract? Because that's all marriage is. Love is love. You don't need a contract for love, it just happens.

Break with tradition. See love in reality. See the church for what it is doing. Marriage is a man-made illusion – it did not evolve out of nature. Nature does not need contracts. You are in love, so be in love. Don't ask your government to make your love “official,” it means nothing, all that matters is that you are in love. Enjoy it. It is the most wonderful feeling in the world.

[Back to Index](#)

Massage

1. *Manually manipulate (someone's body), usually for medicinal or relaxation purposes*

*I don't have time for a massage I'm much too busy!
And anyway, massage is for women, I'm a real man.
Real men don't get massages.*

People are so stressed these days! It's just go, go, go, all the time. In modern city life you seem to get carried along with the flow. Everybody else seems to be moving fast so we should too. We don't have time for anything. We work harder than ever, we have children to look after, we have to take the children here there and everywhere, we have bills to pay, we have a mortgage that we can ill afford. "I'm sooo stressed!"

But hang on, we've always been busy, I mean as a human race; we haven't been sitting idly on our backsides for the last million years. In our developmental years we hunted and gathered, there was no agriculture, no supermarkets, no fruit and vegetable stalls. We caught beasts with our bare hands (ok, maybe a spear), there were no butchers to give us nice cuts of meat presented on a plastic tray and tidily cling wrapped. We had to do everything by hand; there was no machinery to assist us, and amazingly, we walked everywhere (sorry no cars).

So life in those days was pretty hard, especially if you had to fight off a marauding wild beast or two during the course of the afternoon, and the worst thing was there were no pubs to relax in at the end of the day, and nowhere to put your feet up and watch tv.

Let's fast forward to modern times.

I would have thought that with all the wonderful modern inventions that are supposed to make life easier, we would be less stressed. We don't have to worry about catching the food, that's all taken care of for us. We don't have to worry about chopping wood or felling trees to get warm; we have central heating. We have cars or public transport to move around in, so no more walking. We have children to look after, but then we always did, and children are nice to be around aren't they? So what's making us so busy that we don't have time for anything else, and why are our stress levels so high that we reach for the drinks cabinet as soon as we get home! One word. Us.

I bet you thought I was going to say the dreaded W word, Work, but no, we have always had to work. Man has always been productive, and must find a way to pay for the goods and services he uses. So unless your chosen career is as a bank robber where you will probably spend most of your time relaxing in prison, or as a layabout, in which case someone else has to go out to work to pay for you, you will have to do some kind of work which gains you the method of exchange of the day – money.

Let's get back to "us" though; we who are stressed in life. We who find it difficult relaxing, because of the turbulence in our minds.

Although we have been constantly evolving since Man first stood on two legs all those millions of years ago in africa, it has really only been in the last fifty years or so that the pace of life has gone supersonic, and I just don't think our physical brains are ready for that.

Can you imagine our cavemen ancestors getting up at 5.30 am, gulping down a coffee, sitting in the car for an hour and a half in a traffic jam, followed by eight or nine hours of deadlines, under tremendous pressure to work faster and harder, followed by an hour and a half drive back home, followed by an argument with his wife, two screaming kids, and a reheated microwave meal? It would be enough to turn them to drink!

But the strange thing is, for some reason, we love it. We love the pressure, whether real or imagined, because we like talking to other people about how much pressure we are under and all the things we have to do. We talk in some pseudo-complaining manner which says, "look how stressed I am, but also look how busy and important I am." We love telling people how difficult life is, especially the mothers who don't have to work, because their husband is wealthy.

"You know janice, I've had the most dread-ful day, you wouldn't start to imagine! First, little freddy was up in the night crying, and he just wouldn't settle back to sleep, then emily got up early and wasn't feeling too well, bit of a headache; so we rushed her down to the doctors, because you can't be too sure about these things, then I had to take her to school, and freddy to playgroup, then I had to pick emily up and drop her at her ballet classes. Oh, and did I tell you how long it took me to drive down the high street, the traffic was ridiculous, they really need to do something about that high street, and now I'm doing the shopping before richard gets home, and I need to prepare the kids supper. I really should go janice, so much to do, so little time! Thanks for the coffee..."

We have allowed ourselves to become busier and busier, because it makes us feel good about ourselves.

We have a sense of our own importance in the world when we are busy, and we feel as if we are making a contribution to the world, or at least to the size of our bank balance and ego. But can you see what we have left behind, whilst we battle on at the speed of light; whilst we concentrate only on the “me” in the world?

But we have left precisely that behind. Me! I am not talking about the me you project into this fast moving life, it is the authentic me; the one who is at peace with him or herself, without the need to prove anything to anyone; the one who is naturally balanced and in tune with nature. You may find yourself smiling or laughing at loud, and saying:

“Don't be ridiculous... Naturally balanced? In tune with nature? Who are you kidding? This is reality; we don't live in some zen fantasy world where every man is at peace with himself, we live in the real world, and it isn't like that!”

I would like someone to tell me what the “real” world is like, please? Violent, discontent, angry, afraid, stressed, full of hate, full of desire and power? Is that what the real world is like? Well if it is, I think maybe it's time to talk a little bit about massage, and how it can help us all become less stressed, less angry, and maybe even less violent!

“How is it possible that someone who is not much more than a beauty therapist can help the world?” you ask. Let me tell you a story.

**

I was like everyone else trying to succeed in the city, always rushing somewhere to a customer, to a meeting, to another meeting, and I was pretty highly strung, always ready to snap at someone who I thought was stupid, or who had made a simple mistake. I worked in information technology, drove fast, ate fast food, got home late, had something to eat, and went to the pub for several beers to “chill out.”

I was really busy, but I wouldn't say I was stressed! I talked fast and loud (some people say I still do). I earned quite a lot of money, but spent it on useless gadgets and entertainment whilst struggling to pay my credit card bills... I was still, I believed, a pretty nice guy, although from reading this you wouldn't think so. I just got carried along with the rest of the world, moving fast.

One day I decided to give it all up, and travel to australia, so I sold all my possessions and went backpacking, although I didn't suddenly become a zen master overnight! On the contrary, I pursued backpacking with the same vigour and pace as I had in my previous incarnation as a project manager, casually driving at breakneck speed around the whole continent in a matter of weeks, not months. It took several more years of travelling to start to slow down, due mainly to a lack of funds, not enthusiasm.

On one of the trips my girlfriend and I were planning, we decided to visit thailand, which I had heard was a beautiful country. Whilst there, I had my first massage; fully clothed on a mat on the floor. I had assumed massage would be done semi-naked on a table with oil rubbed into my skin, so was indeed surprised when the lady – who was over fifty but under five foot tall – started moving my body in ways I am sure nature had not intended it to move! All the while she was stretching, pulling, twisting and pressing for two hours. Except I needn't have worried, because in less than fifteen minutes I was almost asleep, or should I say almost in a trance, as I was aware of what was going on but had no urge to move any part of my body.

When I came to at the end of the session, I noticed something strange. I felt light headed, but my body felt heavy and I was breathing slowly and gently. I suddenly felt like all the tensions and problems I had ever experienced, had been gently lifted into the hands of the masseur. I actually felt quite sorry for her, as only then did I realise how much tension I had been storing up!. Less than a year later we both went back to thailand intent on learning this magic, and starting a business in australia to help other people with stress.

Stress

1. *A state of mental or emotional strain or suspense*

The art we studied was called traditional thai massage, invented over 2,500 years ago and brought to thailand with buddhist monks from india, a time when they probably weren't as stressed as we are now; but with all these men of wisdom, they had great foresight when it came to knowing that the technique they had invented would be needed in the future!

The first thing I noticed whilst learning was that when I placed my hands on another's body to commence

the massage, I got a genuine feeling of calmness and connectedness. It may sound strange to you, but I really noticed it. The next thing I remarked upon was that although the person receiving the massage looked as if they were enjoying it, I was enjoying giving it. It was an activity which was performed in silence, with all movement slow and purposeful. No rushing around, no shouting, no deadlines, no talking on the phone. This was something which I the practitioner experienced, not the client.

For me, it was a revelation, to be able to do a job, which not only healed people of daily stress and strain, but made me calm as well. For the first time, I realised that there may be as much therapeutic benefit in giving a massage as actually receiving one. How could I, mr stress, become calm whilst working? It didn't seem possible, but it was actually happening.

After qualifying in our chosen subject, we returned to civilisation to heal the nation of its ills. We came up with a name, designed a brochure, printed some leaflets and business cards, purchased our mats, and found a sports club to practice from. We waited for the door to be beaten down by weary city dwellers, eager to feel less stressed, eager to be more calm in life, but the knock never came. Not one.

So four weeks later, we put up a poster that said: "Introductory offer: First thirty people to write their names down will get a free massage." Within less than a day, the diary was full. Success! we thought, people want our massage! In fact the promotion was so successful we extended the offer for an extra week and that too was fully subscribed. Success again!

Two weeks on, we looked forlornly at the empty diary, wondering where we had gone so wrong. Everyone had said they thoroughly enjoyed it and that they would definitely return soon. Sixty people had all received a free massage, and not one rebooked! Maybe we were just bad at business, we thought. But as time went on, and I talked to masseurs in different countries, a pattern started to emerge which showed large variations in uptake of massage in asia compared to western countries.

In thailand, massage has entrenched itself in the culture, and you can see businessmen with their socks off having their feet massaged everywhere, something you wouldn't see in the united kingdom or the west in general, for several reasons.

First, massage is a rather inconvenient stress reliever. You have to make an appointment, then you have to go there, get changed, lie down for an hour, then you have to get dressed again... It's so much more convenient getting a bottle of wine, or stopping off in the pub on your way home from work. Alcohol relaxes you much quicker, you feel good about yourself you laugh and share a good time with other people, whereas massage is silent, and not as much fun as a bottle of wine.

Second, massage is relatively expensive in the west, and one hour of massage is roughly equal to five times the average hourly wage, so unless clients have a large disposable income, they do not value massage over say going out for a meal, or going to the cinema, viewed in the west as more traditional stress relievers, and that perhaps massage is a bit of a waste of money.

Third, most of the customers were female. Those who were male, came in because of a physical ailment only, like a sore back, stiff neck, tight shoulders, or something they couldn't just shake off. The men weren't interested in understanding that the cause of their back pain may be stress related and they may need to address their lifestyle, in order to combat these physical manifestations of psychological stress.

It got me thinking: "Why do men not like massage, when women clearly like it, if they can afford it?"

Well, Men are MEN! They are strong. They do not show their emotions. They must keep themselves together at all times, and stress is a man's right. He has the right to get stressed, and make everybody else stressed, then deny that he is the cause of the stress. Am I right, ladies? Touch is intimate, and is something men associate with physical contact with a woman. They become uncomfortable being touched by someone, not because they don't like the touch, but entirely the opposite; because they do like it, and they are afraid they may become stimulated physically, and embarrass themselves.

Men do not like to be perceived as weak, and they do not ever want to show their "feminine" side, which although present, is repressed in the dark recesses of the unconscious. But true weakness is the non-acceptance by men that we are stressed and uptight, and that we do need someone to make our shoulders feel better, and our neck more relaxed. The power of touch has magical qualities, which de-stress the nervous system and leave Man ready to fight another mighty battle (probably in the office, not the battlefield).

Of course, some people like myself have already been converted to massage, but others have yet to experience how wonderful you can feel in just five or ten minutes. But I don't believe that this is something that should be left in the realm of "professional therapists." As you have seen by my personal story, people

just aren't that interested in feeling good, unless it's free, and I can see why. It's just too much hassle.

So what if the men are a little agitated, or shout at the children and their wife when they come home because *they* had a bad day? So what if the anger overflows into domestic violence, it's just a little pushing.

I can hear many of you saying: "How do seriously expect massage to change that?"

Because massage makes people relax. It forces them to relax, and relaxed people, are not angry people. This is not about sending your partner off to some clinic once a week to have "anti-anger" and "anti-stress" massages. This is about two partners who are sharing their life together giving each other a ten minute massage when they come in from work. You just have to get into a routine of doing it. Even five minutes is better than nothing. You can buy your own book, or get one from the library, or even go on a short course, or I'll even give you some tips if you call me! But I guarantee the small amount of time invested in learning how to massage the shoulders, neck, back and head will pay you dividends for years to come. Giving the massage is almost as calming as receiving it (although everyone prefers receiving).

So even if you don't want to change your lifestyle for something a bit calmer, the more people massage each other, the less stressed everyone will be when they are going to work, at work, on their way home from work, and back at home. Try it, you've got nothing to lose but five to ten minutes of your life every day and you may gain a lot more in return.

My teacher in thailand said she gave her farmer husband a ten minute head massage when he finished work, every day, because he was tired and stressed when he came in, and it made her life calmer and easier by doing so, "and anyway," she said, "what's ten minutes in a whole twenty four hour day?" and I have to agree. Don't you?

[Back to Index](#)

Meaning

1. *Rich in significance or implication*

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

What is the meaning of life? The ultimate question

Or is it? We are born, we learn about the world, we go to work, we have a family, we teach them what we can, we see them grow up, and start a family. We retire, we enjoy our retirement, we help look after our grandchildren then we die. Whether or not there is such a thing as an afterlife or god, is not the wonder of humanity, that we even exist, that we have made it through millions of years of evolution, and can even consider whether there is a meaning of life not enough? Probably not.

We all want to think we were put on this earth for a higher purpose, that our lives must have meaning, but is that not because of a general dissatisfaction with our lives? Has the man who loves what he does, loves his family, and loves the planet and his fellow inhabitants, not already have found the meaning of life, which is to experience love and share love? If everyone found this meaning, surely the world would be free of war and destruction, don't you think?

Many of us confuse meaning and purpose, but I think purpose can be seen quite clearly as Man's need to spread his genes to ensure the continuity of the species. If our purpose was only to earn money, invent new technologies, and achieve self-realisation, there wouldn't be anyone left on the planet! So having a child is the greatest purpose we can achieve, and all the animals, birds, insects, micro-organisms, and fish also share this purpose. A built in biological program to continue their individual species.

But that's where the similarities stop. In the long development of our brains, we have created something called imagination.

Imagination

1. *The formation of a mental image of something that is not perceived as real and is not present to the senses*

Imagination allows us to think outside of our current situation, to consider new possibilities, to dream of fantastic ideas, to think about things that don't affect our immediate survival. This is one thing that makes us human. This is what enabled us to become craftsmen, artists, engineers, and scientists. We developed the ability to imagine scenarios, and use our skills to make them real.

The imagination is a powerful thing, and we can use it positively or negatively. We can imagine great successes or great failures, but what really matters is that it is not real, until we make it real. It is through this imagination then, that the idea came, that perhaps there was some special meaning to life, that getting up and working as a machine every day for ones whole life wasn't quite what it was cracked up to be.

You see, Man has always known he was special, and indeed he is, given that he can walk on two feet, is conscious of himself in his environment, has complex language, opposable thumbs, and great tool making abilities. No other creature on earth has all these skills; but this has left him with one problem. If all of these skills set him apart from the animal world, why does he have to work like them every day? For all that Man has, he still has to feed himself and his family, and provide clothing, heat and shelter every day; and there is only one way to do it. Go to work, just like the animals and birds. Every day.

“Surely there must be more to life than this!”

How many of us have said that? I know I have, as I've been sitting in a two hour traffic queue getting to work, whilst sitting at a desk pushing paper all day, whilst sitting on the underground, whilst sitting in a two hour queue on the way home. All for what? Some money that pays for our accommodation and food.

It doesn't seem fair does it? We are the most intelligent species on the planet and through all our technological advances, we still have to work as hard as the rest of the creatures on the planet. But that's not totally true, is it?

Over the last hundred years, our agriculture methods and food storage abilities have made life distinctly easy. In the developed world, more and more people are doing sedentary jobs, and we are earning enough money to buy our own homes and take time off to go on holiday. Compare that to the lives of our ancient

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

ancestors who had to hunt and gather food. We have it distinctly easy these days. Easy enough to use our powerful imagination to ponder questions, such as the meaning of life.

**

Are you dissatisfied with your life, do you think that there must be something else, that there must be a more deep, and profound reason why you are on the earth? That there must be a creator who has a special plan in mind for you? Or are you happy to accept you are part of a fantastic cycle of life and death, that keeps this planet alive and healthy nothing more? That you are different to the animals only because of a process of natural selection and evolution?

Do you think that there is a special “meaning” for the other creatures on earth or is that feature only reserved for us humans?

Our amazing brains and imaginations can ponder the question of meaning forever, because there is no scientific test for it! We cannot effectively prove or disprove that there is something more than just existence, but if you think about it, existence isn't such a bad thing. On the one hand you exist, you are alive; thanks to your father finding a mate, and successfully transferring his genes to you. On the other, you get to experience the beauty of the earth, and all of its inhabitants. You can raise a family of your own, and you can learn about wonderful and amazing things.

And finally, you get to experience love, something no machine we produce can feel. If there ever was a meaning of life it is love. When your parents hold you as a baby you feel it. Without it, you feel empty, as if a part of you was missing. You love your parents, you love many partners through your life (or just one), you love your children, and if you love everyone and everything, you will never again have to ask if there is a meaning, because you will already have found it.

Meaning is love, but meaning is also how we approach life. When we love what we do, when we feel joy in getting up in the morning, when we look forward to each and every day and the challenges it brings, we have all the meaning in the world.

The problem for most of us in modern society, is that we do things every day because we have to, not because we love doing them. I know for sure that if I asked myself the meaning of life a few years ago, it certainly wouldn't be getting up at 5.45 am every morning for a two hour drive, followed by office stress for nine hours – no matter how much money I was being paid! It makes sense we all do what we love, but unfortunately that's not always possible.

When we're young many of us dream of being actors, pilots or great doctors, but the world needs more real workers than it needs thespians on the stage. Somebody still has to work to harvest the crops, to make the clothes and build the houses and the roads, that make modern life so comfortable.

[Back to Index](#)

Meat

1. *The flesh of animals (including fishes and birds and snails) used as food*

I am a vegetarian, so you may think I am biased in writing this section. When I started writing this book I promised myself I would not enforce my opinions on other people, and that part of being human is the ability to make up one's own mind about things based on the information we have available. So in that spirit, I will let you make up your own mind about whether to become a vegetarian! It is not for me to decide. I made a personal choice for me, that is all.

Speak to anyone about eating meat, and they will tell you: "Man is supposed to eat meat. Man is a hunter. We are meat eaters, no question about it." Not because they investigated whether Man is indeed a meat eater, omnivore or vegetarian, but because, as children, their parents fed them meat and told them it was good for them. The children naturally trust their parents, and happily eat meat for the rest of their lives without giving it a second thought.

On the surface it does no harm does it? In fact the scientists have said that without eating meat, Man would never have evolved such a large and complex brain, which means that if my ancestors didn't eat meat, I wouldn't have had the brain capacity to be able to write this book! So perhaps in our evolution from tree dwelling apes living on vegetarian diets to an upright being with intelligence and tool making abilities, the consumption of meat, and the proteins derived from it, have been critical to our development.

But let's forget evolution for a moment, as here we are in the present day, able to not only use complex tools, but able to design spacecraft to go to the moon. That certainly is a giant leap.

So maybe steak and chips is the only way to go if we want to progress even further. Perhaps eating more meat will help us become more compassionate human beings, perhaps we will become less violent, perhaps we will have empathy with others, perhaps we will even know what it is to truly love.

Eat more meat equals become better humans.

Because let's face it, we've come a long way in the last two hundred years. Industrialisation, better medicine, better living standards, better science, more equality, less slavery, more money, and more comfort; but is that really because we ate meat?

We started on the long path to becoming homo sapiens several million years ago, but "civilisation" as we know it only started taking place about ten thousand years ago, with the domestication of animals for food, followed by the start of agriculture, and the building of the first cities.

Ancient civilisations developed medicine, culture, tools, roads, water supply systems, political and legal structures, philosophy, literature and mathematics over thousands of years and we have eventually arrived. Here. 2007.

Maybe we got here because we ate meat, maybe we got here on our own without eating meat; all I know is that we are now the most intelligent species on the planet, and with that, comes a lot of responsibility. Responsibility to ourselves, the species we share the planet with and the planet itself. We are now in the enviable position of having complete control over everything that exists here (including other humans). Life or Death. That is a lot of power to hold in such delicate hands, don't you think? In fact, the power lies not within our hands, but within our minds.

We have the ability to destroy or create in seconds. A thought is generated, and that thought becomes action.

I see the rabbit, and in a millisecond my gun is raised, and I have the choice to pull the trigger and end its life or not.

But life wasn't always as easy for the hunter. In the old days, it was an arduous task hunting down dangerous wild beasts. For a start, we had to chase them on foot, and we didn't have guns, so we had to get close. Of course, all that's changed now. Food is ready prepared for us, and sitting on the shelf, looking very un-animal like, ready to put into the frying pan to tenderise the meat and make it easily digestible for us. No more spearing the animal to death, then cutting off its skin and gutting it; someone else does that for us, and it's that which I want to talk to you about today.

**

As we have discussed in other topics, the control we exert over all other living species is lacking in all things human. Love, Compassion and Empathy. We call ourselves animal lovers, but happily chomp away on their flesh; but for once, I want to give humans the benefit of the doubt here. We are all products of the past, of our parents and society, so maybe we have failed to make the connection between the "cute" animals we adore so

much, and the fried chicken on our plate.

As children, and as adults, we enjoy watching animals in their natural habitat. Cows, deer, birds, dolphins, whales (if you're lucky enough to see one), pigs, and chickens, amongst others, and we feel automatic empathy with an animal if we see it suffering (after being hit by a car for example). In fact, we can't bear to see animals in pain, even if we are meat eaters.

Vegetarians haven't got a monopoly on empathy you know! It's a natural emotion that is within all of us, it just needs the right trigger to activate it. You may or may not think that animals have a consciousness, but they are definitely aware of themselves in their surroundings, even if they cannot question the nature of their own existence. One thing is also sure, they *do* feel pain, no doubt about that, and it is exactly that cry of pain that triggers our own emotional system to feel compassion and empathy for them.

Even humans who have detached themselves from feeling empathy for their victims (such as murderers) still feel it, it's just suppressed. But there is always the possibility of an event or someone triggering it off again. It is the one thing that makes us truly human.

A gangster who cold bloodedly executes his enemies, is in a state of inconsolable grief when he hears his brother has been shot dead, even though he showed his victims no mercy. He can feel the pain his brother suffered at the time the bullet went in. He can share with him in his last breath, and in that moment, he feels empathy, and compassion, even though he has never experienced it before. Empathy and compassion are always there ready to be used, we just need to make the right connections in our brains to trigger them.

A violent warlord, who brutally tortured and killed his own people, could never do the same to someone he loved, like his mother or his wife. Why? Because he feels compassion for them, and compassion is the one emotion that stops humans killing. So, we have seen that humans *can* experience compassion, albeit selectively, but it's a start!

Let me ask you a question. When you go to the butcher or the supermarket to buy your meat, what do you feel when you pick up a chicken breast, sirloin steak or a fillet of fish? Do you feel empathy with that cling wrapped package? Of course you don't, that would be as foolish as feeling empathy with a loaf of bread, because there is no connection between what the eye sees and the origin of the product.

Mince is just mince, and a chicken leg is just a chicken leg. We do not think of these as animals. These packages are not pigs, nor cattle, nor chickens. The animals have been reduced to pieces, or ground up so we may enjoy chicken curry, spaghetti bolognese, chicken drumsticks or hamburgers amongst others.

To give you a better example; I recently showed a documentary to some close friends which showed graphic images of animals being tortured, tormented, and brutally killed, and each one of my friends (non-vegetarians) said: "I can't watch this any more, it's horrific." Some refused to watch saying: "I'm very sensitive, I love animals, I can't watch it, it would make me cry," but all of them said they would continue to eat meat, because "humans are meat eaters," or "I love meat too much to give it up, but I do eat a lot of vegetables."

Evidence once again of the lack of connection between the living animal and the end product on the plate.

If you have a pet dog or cat, would you like to see it caged with thousands of other dogs and cats, with no space to move, let alone run and play in the wild where they belong? Imagine watching its fur being brutally skinned off while it was still alive, or seeing its throat slit, and having its trachea pulled out, hung upside down, and left to bleed to death, still screaming in agony?

Let's put it another way.

Would you like to see your son, daughter, wife or your parents, being forced to live in disgusting conditions where disease is rife, in huge factories, and caged? Where they are branded with red hot steel or have a plastic tag put through their ear, or a chain through their nose; where the workers not only kill, but torture your family to death, and leave them sliced open and bleeding, writhing on the floor trying to gasp fresh air while they slowly choke on their own blood?

Do you agree with the death penalty for murder of other human beings? Well the way animals are treated is much, much, much, more brutal than any execution, and at least these condemned murderers had a chance to live out their life before they made the mistake of killing someone. These animals have no such choice; they are created to be killed.

This is different. This is no accident. This is deliberate. This is cruelty and murder above anything humans are capable of doing to each other.

Think about this. If one man sends six million people to their death in the gas chamber, he is considered

inhuman, a monster; but if a man kills sixty million chickens a year, he is considered a successful businessman! Tell me, where is the difference?

You will probably say that we are the supreme predator, we are meat eaters! But what a weak supreme predator we are; not like the lion, who chases after his prey when he is hungry. We have no need to chase prey now. We can grow them in factories and fields, keep them controlled until they are fat enough to kill, then lead them to their death.

We are not like the lion any more. We kill animals; not because we are hungry, but because we are powerful; because we have electric cattle prods, guns, chains and machines, and we want to eat meat, so we do. Not because we have to, but because we are superior. And superior beings get to do what they like, isn't that right?

Superior

1. One of greater rank or station or quality

Why do you think we are superior to every other species on the planet? Is it that we are the most intelligent? Or is it because we have invented guns and other devices to kill at will, from a safe distance? We are certainly not superior because we are the strongest physically. Imagine a hungry lion coming into the city, and fighting it hand to hand. Would we win? No, of course not. A lion is designed to eat meat; he has evolved that way, and uses his physical strength and teeth to overcome his prey. We had to invent weapons to overcome the lion and other large species.

Would you be able to wrestle a cow to death? Or a deer? Or would you be able to catch sheep whilst running after them? No, our human bodies are not fast enough, agile enough, nor strong enough for that. We would find it difficult to kill a beast with our bare hands, so we have used our newly developed intelligence to control them. Have you ever wondered why most animals are not actually scared of us in the wild? It is because we are not their natural predator. Animals are not scared of us because we are not on their blueprint of predators. Their brains are hard wired to experience fear when specific species are near, but we are not one of those specific species and we use this to our advantage.

You see, animals have no concept of what an abattoir, electric spike, bolt gun, or what a de-beaking machine is. They have no concept of tail and ear clippers, cages, chains, or knives. These are not in the natural world. These are man-made objects which are at odds with the natural cycle of life and death in the wild. These are tools we use to be superior.

Nature is finally balanced between the carnivores and vegetarians. Too many vegetarians and the natural resources become depleted. Too many meat eaters and the diversity of species becomes reduced. Nature has been balancing the books on the planet for over four billion years, and then we come along, newly evolved with our big brains, ready to raise the planet to the ground. Surely some mistake in evolution?

We charge through life without a care in the world. Killing, clearing, chopping, and digging up the planet, like some naughty child in a playground. Happy to label ourselves "the supreme predator." Predator, yes. Intelligent, no.

We have no idea about nature. We study it, dissect it, control it, and exploit it, but we are thousands, if not millions of years away from ever understanding how to live in harmony with it, or realising that we are just a small part of nature not above it.

I wonder if you have ever watched an animal being lead to its death? You can see the terror in their eyes, but you can also see that they just can't understand what's going on. Look into their eyes. See the fear. See the trust they had in humans, betrayed. See a living creature being sliced open while it is still alive. For what? A chicken curry, a big mac, or a kebab? So we can say "Mmmmm, that's so tasty," eat half of it and casually toss the animal into a bin?

Imagine if that was a human, what would you feel then?

To have so little disregard for any life makes me so sad. We all say we love our pets and animals, but please try to make the connection between them and eating meat. Just imagine now, your pet whom you love, being stamped on, beaten with a hammer, or sliced open whilst alive, just so people can enjoy a dog burger, a dog curry, or a dog kebab. If we do not have empathy for the other species who live along side us on this

planet, how are we to ever expect to have empathy for our own species?

If you continue to eat meat, you may as well have put the knife in the animal and watched it bleed to death yourself. You are responsible for its death.

Although the abattoirs may be out of sight in your comfortable home, the abattoir is with you every stage of the cooking process to cook your beautiful “meat.” When you make the connection between the fillet steak on your plate and the animal that unwittingly gave up its short life, sliced open at the throat and left to bleed to death whilst still conscious, you may just realise that we have no more right to determine the fate of an animal, than we have the right to determine the fate of other human beings. We all live side by side here, and if we want to retain the title of “most intelligent species on the planet” we had better start behaving like it.

I gave up eating all living things about eight years ago, and since that time, without exception, in every country I have visited in the world, people have looked at me strangely when I tell them I don't eat meat. “Why don't you eat meat?” “It's Natural;” “We are the supreme predator;” “I can't believe you are a vegetarian.”

“Men shouldn't be vegetarians,” they say. It's almost as if they feel threatened by me choosing not to eat animal flesh, as if somehow it compromises my masculinity and theirs. “Man is a hunter, he is a meat eater, we have always been meat eaters,” they say. But if you knew anything about the history of Man, you would know that Man was first a vegetarian and we do not have the necessary biology to eat raw meat like a lion does.

We have to process it artificially to make it edible, then we have to cook it to make sure there is no bacteria still alive. If we were a natural meat eater we wouldn't have to do all that. You don't see a lion carving up his steak first then casually grilling it over a fire. The lion eats everything, one bite at a time. That's a natural meat eater.

So why do we continue to angrily defend our “right” to eat meat? Maybe because it isn't natural, but like so many things we humans do, is something we “want” to do, because we can. People who have criticized me for not eating meat always want to know the real reason I gave it up, and they feel quietly satisfied if I tell them it was for health reasons only. If I say that I disagree with our dominance and lack of empathy of other species that creates a huge argument and discussion which starts with “Man is a meat eater...”

Let's move away from empathy, compassion, and argument for a moment, and let's talk about our parents. If our parents hadn't given us meat when we were young, and if we didn't see other children eating it, do you think you would still be “natural” meat eaters? If your parents were vegetarian and your friends were vegetarian, do you think it would ever cross your mind that you fancied some deep fried chicken nuggets or fish fingers? Is it not wholly possible that the reason we are meat eaters is in fact a result of conditioning?

“Eat your meat! You'll grow up to be a strong boy!”

If I have managed to survive very nicely whilst being a vegetarian (who eats no dairy or eggs also), and continue to enjoy eating thai, italian, indian, mexican, and french cuisine without one animal nor my taste buds suffering, is it not reasonable to suppose that I actually didn't need it in the first place? I am healthy, I am not malnourished, and in fact I feel pretty good!

The problem lies in our arguments for eating meat, in that they are not made with an inquiring mind to find out the truth. The arguments we make are pure conditioning, pure past; a memory of what was told to us by our parents, teachers, and society. If we are to progress as a species we need to inquire into the nature of all things, not blindly accept what others have told us and fight anyone who challenges that thought with automatic responses.

It is not enough just to say something is so to make it so. Do not use other people's arguments. If you want to make a case for eating meat, then inquire into with your own mind, but until someone can convince me that being vegetarian is not only bad for my health, and has not enabled me to be a more compassionate human being, not only to the animals, but also to my fellow humans, then I will get back to enjoying my vegetarian thai curry thanks.

[Back to Index](#)

Meditation

1. *Continuous and profound contemplation or musing on a subject or series of subjects of a deep or abstruse nature*
2. *(religion) contemplation of spiritual matters (usually on religious or philosophical subjects)*

I never knew anyone who “did” meditation until a few years ago when I started travelling. I met a man who was later to become a close friend of mine who was a buddhist. He meditated every day, and told me this was the one way to find yourself, and reach enlightenment. He had tibetan singing bowls, a small altar, images of the buddha and various incense sticks burning. Here he would sit every day trying to quieten his mind; and although I wasn't really interested in it, the ritual seemed like fun; and although I didn't believe in religion, I began to try it.

Several years past, and I was no further forward. I always found myself thinking about other things, and the more I tried to focus on a sound, or just watch the movement of my mind, the more I thought about what I would be having for dinner that evening, or what bills needed to be paid. It was a most frustrating process.

So last year I moved into a buddhist community on a small island in scotland so I could concentrate on finishing my writing, and at the same time try to “improve” my meditation practice.

Every morning, and every evening, we would go to the meditation hall, someone would light the candles and the buddhists would do their prostrations (*abject submission; the emotional equivalent of prostrating your body*) in front of an image of the buddha. We would take our places solemnly on our meditation cushions in either a lotus position (*legs crossed; used in yoga*) or some other position, and someone would chime the bell to signal the beginning of formal meditation.

It began. I would sit and try to focus on the sound of the birds singing or follow the rise and fall of my breath or simply watch my mind, but my mind was always too busy thinking about what I would be cooking in the kitchen for everyone at lunchtime, or what topic I would be trying to discuss in my book in the evening.

Once again I felt frustrated by this lack of “progress” and sat down to discuss it with one of the monks. He listened to my frustrations and assured me that there was no right or wrong meditation practice, which cheered me up a little. Day after day, I just sat in the meditation hall, not caring whether I was doing it right or wrong and just tried to enjoy it.

Several months later, I left the retreat, happier that I had been doing a lot of writing, but unsure as to whether the meditation practice had left me enlightened. I was forced to admit it probably hadn't!

Over the next few weeks, I contemplated meditation and its purpose, and how sitting in a weird cross legged position watching your thoughts could help you reach “enlightenment” whatever that was, and the more I thought about it, the more I could see that any regimented practice – however helpful – was not the answer.

The answer came to me when I was sitting on a train, dreaming out the window, looking at the trees and the fields and the cows. This was it, this was the state of meditation I couldn't understand! Not just watching your thoughts, but watching nature and being with nature. Later that day, I went for a walk in the woods alone. I found a suitable tree and just sat underneath it. No images of the buddha, no incense, no singing bowls, no special cushions or candles. Just sitting.

Sitting, just sitting

I cannot express in words what I felt there. The emptiness surrounded me yet at the same time I felt held, supported, together. It was a strange feeling. I realised that this was what formal meditation was missing. In their desire to quieten the mind through special tricks, they failed to allow nature – which is everything – to communicate with them.

All the time we had been sitting in the meditation hall it felt like a one way communication, with “me” in control. Me controlling my thoughts, me trying to quieten my mind, whereas here was I alone in a wood with nothing, yet everything was with me. Everything was me. I was everything. I can tell you it was one of the eeriest moments of my life. Knowing, yet not knowing, and it scared me a little.

Here was I, a human being, a member of homo sapiens, someone who had never cared about anything in his life apart from going out to pubs and clubs, sleeping around with women and earning and spending as much as I could, suddenly understanding what it meant to be human. I realised I understood everything, but at the same time understood nothing, which is a strange predicament to find yourself in! The trees, the leaves, the soil, the sky, the stars, the ants, the foxes, the beetles, me, the moon, the water, the sun, me, the

water.

Over the next few months, I spent more and more time just being with nature, but that doesn't mean I just sat under a tree, after all, I had still had a job to do during the day. But whilst in the car driving, walking down the high street, going to the cinema, going out for a meal, talking with friends on the phone, I suddenly realised that everything was meditation. I was the meditation and so was nature.

Through the quiet observation of everything in the world, everything became clear. I didn't have to sit on a meditation cushion anymore, burning incense and trying every technique to try to quieten my mind. Sure those things were nice, but it wasn't meditation. This disturbed me somewhat.

I had planned to go to several other monasteries including a zen temple in Japan to try to learn proper meditation, but now I realised I didn't have to go anymore. There were no more techniques to learn, no more steps to follow, it was just me, on my own. Even a few months earlier that feeling would have scared me, but now I knew that there was nothing to be scared of.

I was part of nature, part of the universe and it was part of me, we are one. All this fancy meditation was doing was keeping us separate from what really is, keeping the mind happy we were going towards something, attaining something, which is still attachment.

No longer could I be scared of dying. Dying means nothing except the significance that our minds, trapped in fear, are giving it. True meditation, the communing with nature, releases that fear.

Let me ask you a question, if we agree that water is a living thing, does it ever die?

Yesterday I sat on the balcony of the house I am staying at in the north of Sweden, and looked at several icicles hanging from the roof. The temperature was increasing slowly, and some of them were melting, and as they did, they fell gently into the snow below. When spring comes, the snow will melt, and the water will run into the river below, or evaporate in the atmosphere through the heat of the sun's rays. It may not be an icicle anymore but it has not died. It is a part of the universe, as we are. No birth no death, just changing state. Do you see? The only reason we believe we are separate from the universe is that our minds have told us we are, it does not mean it is the truth.

So get up off your cushions, throw away your images, candles, and meditation music, and walk or sit in nature. Do not try to force your mind to focus on the sounds of the birds singing, remember your mind is part of that singing. There is no goal to this; no purpose; we are just sitting quietly. Do not close your eyes for then you are back in the realm of your mind, which is darkness. Keep your eyes open, let your mind see!

Unfortunately, I cannot help you to become better at doing this by offering you special techniques, for there are none. No yoga positions will help you commune with the universe better! It is funny we think we are being more in touch with the universe by sitting in a special position. Don't get me wrong, yoga and formal meditation are all better than sitting in a pub drinking and fighting or causing trouble for your family and everyone else.

I am not offering you a "better" way, I am just telling you a story of my own experience. You must find out for yourselves, and maybe you would like to join in with a group doing "meditation" practice, after all, how often do we find the time to sit down quietly without fidgeting and talking. Anything which makes you slow down can never be a bad thing. Just be aware of the reason you are doing it.

If you are stressed and overworked then listening to some calming meditation music whilst smelling some beautiful incense will help you feel better, I guarantee it.

I have tried all these techniques, and they have helped me feel better at times when I was feeling low. It feels nice to sit in the lotus position, to hear the chimes of the bells and take part in what is really an ancient ritual, but it has nothing to do with being in meditation. Meditation is the awareness of yourself and others whilst on the train, whilst going about your daily business. It can never be separate, otherwise it just becomes a bolt-on, albeit a nice smelling, calming one! You must be the meditation. You are the meditation. You just are, as a friend of mine once said to me. I never understood what he meant when he said that. In fact, when I used to ask him how he was, he used to reply: "I am," or "I just am," which used to infuriate me!

"How can you just be, when I have asked you how you are?" I used to shout. "You are either good, happy, a bit under the weather, unhappy, etc. you can't just be!!"

"But I am," he would say.

It has taken me a long time to understand that indeed he had had the realisation that he just was. And that is the key. Everything is in balance. Everything is working just as it should work. There is nothing wrong.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Everything is perfect, except us, because we cannot except that we are as one with the trees, and the birds, and the snow and the mountains.

Imagine when you see that you are; that there is no difference between you and a rock! You just think you are different. But there again, so did I.

There is no time-scale for this. You will get it one day. You just have to let go and you will find that which is already there. I am not suggesting it is easy, but then again it is not difficult because there's nothing to do!

I cannot tell you how I came to this, for it would not be the truth, just a story. It is something you, and only you will be able to discover for yourself. I urge you not to wait though. Start your journey of discovery right now, for now is the only time to do anything.

[Back to Index](#)

Memory

1. *Something that is remembered*
2. *The cognitive processes whereby past experience is remembered*
3. *The power of retaining and recalling past experience*

Like a fantastic video recorder, our brain stores every piece of information that the eyes see, that the body feels, and the hands touch. Every comment, sensation, and experience is diligently recorded; and the amazing thing is, we never seem to run out of tape! Everything is stored, ready to be accessed at some future time. Some things we find harder to remember than others (in that they are stored somewhere on the tape that is harder to retrieve), but everything is there. Good experiences, bad experiences, pain, and joy, all there ready to help you form opinions about future events, people you meet, or situations you find yourself in.

So we know that memory is important. We need to remember basic things, such as how to brush our teeth, how to drive a car, how to do our jobs, or even how to make lasagne! But what I want to discuss with you here is something different, it is the use of memory to enable us to live in the past, not in the present moment. Let me explain...

Photographs

Just yesterday, I destroyed all the photographs I had taken (digitally stored and printed), which to most people would seem like an extreme measure, something destructive. I assure you it was not, although it took a lot of courage to hit the delete key and to throw the other pictures on the fire. I felt a well of emotions rise in me, as I first looked at each picture individually and then watched as part of my life disappeared for ever.

To watch photos of my parents and I on happy outings, or my wife and I during our happier times travelling round the world, started stirring lots of feelings. Suddenly, I felt sad that my parents had split up, and I longed for them to have stayed together so we could have gone on family holidays, and I could have enjoyed their company together and watched them growing old, and how I longed for my wife and I to be back together so we could enjoy ourselves as much as we were enjoying ourselves in the pictures.

As I carried on going through my pictures it was like watching a movie of my life. Although the pictures were still, as soon as I viewed them I got the full movie running in my mind, courtesy of our old friend, memory. I looked at pictures of myself, and realised that the camera does lie. I saw myself with a group of friends in a bar, smiling as if I didn't have a care in the world, but then my memory reminded me that at that time I was feeling terrible unhappy with my life.

My wife and I were separating, I was going to have to leave australia, and I didn't know what I was going to do. I tossed the picture on the fire. Friends I would never see again, old girlfriends, people I met on my travels, people I worked with, people I got drunk with all either erased from my hard disk, or burnt on the fire.

My life was slipping away, my past disappearing, all that I was and am was burning. I would never see these people again, I would never see the way the light danced on a tree I had photographed, I would never again see how I looked last year on that specific day with that specific smile.

Then it came to me, that this whole memory thing was complete nonsense! I thought to myself: "Why do I need physical images, when I've got it all up in my brain?" Do you understand? But we like to have images of events that have happened to us or of people we know don't we? We like to "look back" and reminisce about the good times, to say: "If only life was like that now." But can you see what a dangerous trap we are setting for ourselves? Instead of living right now, in this moment, with pain or joy, we are returning to a safe place where everything is ok. We are living in our memories – which are past.

Can you see now why I, as someone who wants to live each moment as it comes, needs to let go of the past: why I must get rid of photographs? I can hear some of you saying now: "What's the problem with a few photographs, they aren't doing anyone any harm," but hopefully, as we progress through our discussion it will become clearer.

Letting go of memories

It's a strange thing memory, and as I got rid of the last photographs, I noticed something interesting had

happened. I suddenly felt free. Free of the burden of my past! It was an enlightening moment, and one I could not have predicted would happen. As the final photograph disappeared, I realised that now I could live in the present. Hanging on to photographs just so I could “remember” people and places I have been was exactly the same as keeping old things because they bring back happy memories.

Are our lives so miserable that we need keepsakes (*something of sentimental value*) to be happy?

Last week, during the christmas holidays, I watched my girlfriend’s brother put some photographs into an album, which he carefully labelled and finally put away on a bookshelf. I asked him why he was bothering to take and keep photos especially as he couldn’t see them often, and he said: “so I remember where I’ve been.” For me this was rather a poignant statement. Rather than knowing where he is, he is content to know where he was.

And we all do this to some extent, don’t we? We carefully catalogue the past and plan for the future, but never do we once think about just accepting that we are alive now. Right at this moment. Think about it carefully for a moment. The past doesn’t exist and the future doesn’t exist, except in your mind. Memories are just an unfortunate side effect of living.

Imagine if you lost your memory. Who would you be without it? This does happen to people, and they spend a huge amount of time trying to find out who they were! Do you see? It makes no difference to me if you remember the good times of our relationship. Now that relationship is over, it is past. I live now. What I am trying to understand with you here is what benefit memories (apart from the ones that enable us to carry out daily tasks in life) have for us, as humans?

Do animals have memories? They say that some do, including elephants; but do they reminisce about the good old times when so and so was around before he got eaten? Or the time when they all climbed a tree or flew around? Of course not. They live right now.

It seems it is only the human being who desperately clings to the happy past in order to protect himself from what seems to him a very scary present and future, although perhaps there are animals who have the unfortunate burden of the reminiscing device, for it is a burden.

Maybe it is part of our make up as humans that we attach memories to our emotions. Maybe in the past it had some biological benefit, such as remembering that a lion was a dangerous animal and thus triggering the body to act, or remembering that a certain fruit with a delicate scent was very tasty. From a survival point of view it makes sense. From a “living in the present moment” point of view, they are a hindrance, a burden that man can do without.

I remember that song...

Have you ever noticed how you can hear a piece of music and are instantly back to where you first heard it? A certain love song you listened to with a partner, or a song you used to dance to when out with your friends? Of course you have. There are literally hundreds of songs, that as soon as I hear them, I can see myself laughing with an old girlfriend, or at school, or out with friends at a pub, or crying, miserable because my girlfriend has just left me, or angry with someone for betraying me, or not paying money back they owed. It’s incredible isn’t it? The worlds best video recorder!

I may not have thought about an ex-girlfriend for fifteen years, when suddenly a song comes on that was playing a lot whilst we were going out together, and I’m back. Cue video and... Action! My masterful memory machine kicks in. The video is running in my mind. I can see my girlfriend and I out in the car, laughing and joking, having so much fun, listening to this song on the radio.

And then suddenly I feel sad. It’s such a shame I split up from her, she was really nice. Then cue profile video. I can see her beautiful hair, smell her sexy perfume, see her smile, her figure... Roll back to the present. The song ends. You forget about her!

Our memory works by association. We associate things in the present with things in the past and compare them. As we said earlier, that worked perfectly for our ancestors. It works the same with smells.

Three months ago I smelled a perfume on a woman, as she passed me in the street, and it was the same perfume a girl I had a six month relationship with wore ten years ago! I hadn’t seen, nor heard from this girl in all that time, but when I smelt the perfume, I quietly said her name aloud and then quickly turned around to see if it was her. It wasn’t, of course, but nonetheless my heart was beating with a little more excitement

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

than usual. Why was this? After all, I remember when we split up. It wasn't pleasant, lots of shouting, and swearing and "I hate you."

But memory is something else. It only remembers the good times. The same way as someone who is addicted to alcohol is shown lots of lovely pictures of himself and others having a rip roaring time whilst out drinking, subtly forgetting to mention the bad times where he fell down, got in a fight, lost his job etc...

Freedom from the past

I am sure, that like me, you like to cling on to your memories – whether they be physical objects or a process in the brain – but how can we hope to let go of fear and the past, if we hold on to it so tightly? That is why I have stopped taking photographs. I want to experience the moment. I do not want to look back to the moment, months, or even years later. The moment passed and I experienced it. The end. I do not need a physical reminder.

When people go on holiday and take photographs, they inevitably take most of them of their friends or family. "That's me on the beach, oh, and that's me on the jet ski, and that's me and John drunk in the bar, oh, and that's me..."

So why do we take them? Because we want to matter. We want to prove we existed. We don't want all traces of ourselves and our lives disappearing when we die. We want someone else to be able to see that at one point in the history of the universe, we were here. Physically. And here is the evidence to prove it. What do you think?

Do you care if people knew you existed? Do you want memories left of you when you die, so that people can look back and say: "Oh, and that was my great grandfather Joe..." What does it matter? The universe has been in existence for billions of years. The universe will always be in existence in some shape or form. The earth will not.

Eventually the earth, as we know it, won't exist anymore, but we keep gathering more and more to prove we were here. In our desperate desire to never die, we even have grave stones erected with our names on them, and sometimes people come and light candles and say a few prayers (*the act of communicating with a deity*) for us, or if we are cremated, we have our ashes placed in a little urn above someone's fireplace! We want to remember, and we want to be remembered – even if that memory is just a process in the brain.

But what will happen to those memories in a billion years? How many things and how many people do we want to remember? How many photographs will we keep? As with all things on the earth even photographs change state. The ink breaks down as does the paper and hard disks stop working. Eventually we are going to have to let go, don't you think?

Sometimes the memories are not even personal ones. We are passed down memories from our parents and our teachers about entire nations! For example, some Jewish people still hate the German people for what was done to their ancestors during the second world war, even if they weren't even born then! We have to pay the utmost attention to what our memory is doing, to how it is moving, and why if we are to be truly free of the prison of the past.

On the surface, you can probably see why Jewish people may hate the Germans but the German people are not those who actively murdered their ancestors. That moment has passed and now is now. The people are different because they live NOW. Even if we, or our ancestors have been wronged in the past, we must let the past stay where it is, and not attempt, through memories, to bring it alive again – that is truly destructive, and can only fuel further animosity between people.

The British did some terrible things to many millions of people during their violent reign over different countries, so some people say we must remember it to avoid it happening again, but that can never be the way forward. Why must we force ourselves and our children to remember events from the past? Even if you were part of the events, they are gone, never to be repeated in the way you remember them, for now is now. Remember that. You may have suffered, your friends and family may have suffered, but they are past, and no amount of remembering them, or the suffering you endured, will change those events. Do you follow?

The children must remember

In school, we are forced to remember dates and places of great battles country has fought in, amongst many other topics. This teaching forms part of what they call history (*a record or narrative description of past events*) and all over the world, historians are writing books about the past, and all over the world, children are reading and remembering about the past. It seems natural, doesn't it? Most people would agree that no education would be complete without learning about the past.

But I am not talking about biology, or geology here, this is about our human past. The history where we conquered, where we controlled, where we killed and were killed, where we grew powerful, where we became rich, where we built great cities. The history we want to remember. The history that forms part of our national identity. Through the countless books and talks, children are imprinted once and for all with this sense of nationality. So as you see, teaching about the past is not simply part of education, but of conditioning.

Children don't know why they have to learn about the past, they are just told that they *must*, in order to pass their exams. "It is important," say the teachers, "that children know the history of their country."

I have but one simple question. Why? What sort of damage do you think telling children they must remember the past is having? Do you think that teaching about the past is psychologically beneficial? Sure they may be able to pass their exams but that isn't what life is about. Life is about living right now, experiencing every moment. Living each day with joy. Learning about battles and famous emperors doesn't help us do that.

So imagine for a moment, if you will, that we didn't teach about the past! Imagine if we taught that living now is the only important thing, and the past does not matter because it does not exist. It did exist, not as past, but as the present which is now. I hope you are following all this!

As humans we are psychologically attached to memory. Memory is not just something you access when you are looking for information, it works autonomously, giving us helpful (it thinks) little snippets of past video or information that it thinks is important to the current situation, but it isn't. When we approach a new situation with memory we are not meeting it without judgement, which is crucial if we are to live in the present moment without fear, with intelligence and clarity.

If a jewish man or woman meets a citizen of germany, they are bringing all their ancestors memories and their history education to the meeting, do you understand? There is great fear and mistrust based on what they "know" happened in the past. But that past is not now.

We must let go of all psychological memory. You may find this intolerably hard, but do not fight with it, just watch your mind carefully. Do not imprison yourself in the misery of the past, let go and be ready to approach each new day with fresh eyes and a clear mind.

Start today. Take a photograph that "means" a lot to you and get rid of it. Watch how your mind desperately clings to the memory not wanting to let it go, how you desperately want to have that image of someone close to you. But they are. They are all still filed away meticulously by your brain. The most wonderful video recorder in the universe.

[Back to Index](#)

Men

1. *The generic use of the word to refer to any human being*
2. *An adult person who is male (as opposed to a woman)*

*Men may hate, and start wars
Women may love, and cry for them
But there is still no division*

When I first started to lay out this book three years ago, I had men and women as a separate topic. I planned to explore the differences between the sexes, but recently I decided that if I was going to explore this topic correctly, men and women should come under the same heading. You see most people like to “celebrate the differences” between the sexes, or at the very least, compare them. But I don't want to do that, I want to understand the similarities with you and find out how we could have become so divided.

“But men and women *are* different,” I hear you cry. “They are *so* different.” “Men will never understand women and vice versa, that's just the way it is,” and other statements of the conditioned mind. So let's begin shall we? Let's find out what it really means to be human underneath all the labels we give to each other.

Which do you have – a penis or a vagina?

Biologically, this is where the main differences lie. One sex provides the means by which the egg is fertilised, and the other bears the children. This process, (if you don't know already) is made possible by the male achieving an erection and inserting it into the women's vagina. Some minutes later, the male ejaculates, and millions of sperm swim for their lives to achieve their only purpose – find an egg and fertilise it. If the woman is in the correct phase of ovulation this egg will become a fully fledged member of the human species in about nine months. Ok? Everybody understand?

When the child is born the woman will feed the baby from special milk through the mammary glands (*milk-secreting organ of female mammals*). End of biology lesson one.

But let's look a bit closer at the sexes shall we? Let's try to see what is underneath the sexual functions.

Well to start with, both sexes have a skeleton (*the hard structure (bones and cartilages) that provides a frame for the body of an animal*), both have muscles and sinew (*a cord or band of inelastic tissue connecting a muscle with its bony attachment*), both have a central nervous system (*the portion of the vertebrate nervous system consisting of the brain and spinal cord*). With me so far? Both species have a digestive system (*the system that makes food absorbable into the body*) and both have the same system to excrete urine (*liquid excretory product*) and faeces (*solid excretory product evacuated from the bowels*). They both have a heart (*the hollow muscular organ located behind the sternum and between the lungs; its rhythmic contractions move the blood through the body*) and they both have lungs (*the hollow muscular organ located behind the sternum and between the lungs; its rhythmic contractions move the blood through the body*), and last but not least, they both have a brain (*that part of the central nervous system that includes all the higher nervous centres; enclosed within the skull; continuous with the spinal cord*). End of biology lesson two.

So we can see that apart from the obvious sexual reproductive systems, the sexes are identical (I can hear some anatomists standing up wanting to correct me). Sure, there may be some cosmetic hormonal differences I grant you, maybe the hips are a bit wider in a woman so she can give birth more easily, but basically we are both the same structurally. So why are we so different?

Well, let's look at the basic biological roles of each of the sexes. If we look at other mammals we can see that it is the male who goes out to hunt and bring back the food, and the female generally stays and nurtures the young. The male is generally larger and stronger than the female as he is the one responsible for protecting the family from predators, and the human species is no different.

For a period of time, the male needs to provide support for the family, and protect it from harm, and the female performs her biological duties of breast feeding (or somewhat strangely, buying milk from corporations), and creating the mother-child bond to give the infant security, the ability to recognise his mother, and his own species, and generally nurture the child until it is old enough to look after itself.

Humans have an incredibly long childhood with them, not leaving the nest until at least eighteen, and normally early to mid twenties, when they move out to a place of their own, or get married. This is not biological, but social, as they reach “maturity” much earlier (physically, not psychologically).

The mind, as we know, takes much longer to develop than the body. So the women (and the men) are stuck with a child (or children) who is physically mature enough to have children of its own, but psychologically not yet ready for the society we have created. In fact, as my own parents have found out, nurturing a human child can take a lifetime! End of biology lesson three.

Man the hunter – deceased

If we believe that men are the ones who have the biological hunting role, life must seem strange for them these days. They are no longer hunters and they no longer even have to bring in the food, as women have been handed the role of doing the shopping. They no longer have to protect their family in the same way, as we have no other predators to speak of, and we have a fully equipped police force and army to deal with any danger. So what does man do?

It seems that for many thousands of years now, his strict biological role has been in decline so, you can see how confusing it must be for the biological systems. Suddenly, man has no firm role. Agriculture and large scale industrial farming has taken the place of hunting, and although men have to go out to work, it's to earn money to buy the food, not or grow it, catch it., or gather it. We have found ourselves in a very tricky predicament haven't we?

So what to do with all that excess energy? What to do with those fast twitching muscles, adrenaline and fight or flight mechanisms? You can't just turn them off, these are evolutionary adaptations developed over several million years. There is so much pent up energy in the male body that something has to be done to release it.

So one thing man does, is to go out and hunt other humans instead! We may think that war is a terrible blight on the face of humanity, but let's face it, man is just doing what he does best, hunting prey and killing it. The only thing he falls short of is eating it. After all, it's inhuman to eat another member of your own species, but killing them *is* acceptable.

So here he is, the great hunter with too much time on his hands coupled with a large brain, surely a recipe for disaster.

Man has constantly craved power and wealth, and seeks to dominate all around him especially women. But I don't blame men for it, they just haven't got a clue what they're doing! Their systems are in so much conflict, that maybe we should just feel sorry for them.

Let's play some sport

So if we haven't got anything to hunt, because we now get our food from agriculture, and we can't just go around killing anyone we feel like, how do we get rid of this energy? Well, as we see all over the world, man hunts animals for sport, but now it's a little one sided! Gone are the days when men were outmatched by the strength speed and agility of animals, now all it takes is a rifle or shotgun aimed from a great distance and BLAM! The shot is fired, and the animal goes down. The hunters congratulate each other on a great days sport, but even if they eat the animals, there is something a little unsettling about using a long range weapon to kill an unsuspecting animal – surely that's not sport.

The romans had it right. They built great arenas where condemned men would be “thrown to the lions,” and people would cheer as the poor men unsuccessfully fought off the great beasts! Then there was chariot racing (*a two-wheeled horse-drawn battle vehicle; used in war and races in ancient egypt and greece and rome*), and last but not least, the star of the show, the gladiator (*(ancient rome) a professional combatant or a captive who entertained the public by engaging in mortal combat*). This was great entertainment right enough. People forced to fight in an arena to the death. There was no referee to stop the fight if things got nasty, just one rule, fight to the death!

And as the victor drove his sword into the losers chest, and he gasped his final breath on this earth, the crowd cheered, and cheered. This, my friends, is men's idea of fun!

Of course, we don't have anything like that now, no sir, we aren't savages you know! Now, two men go into a ring with the sole intention of knocking the other one down, except this time they wear gloves so they don't smash each others skulls in, and there is a referee on hand to stop the fight if there is too much blood.

The crowd (mostly male) shout and cheer as the defeated boxer is left unconscious on the mat. We may even have won a bit of money by putting a little bet on.

We return home feeling satisfied. We may not have been in the ring, but the adrenaline we used shouting

and cheering was enough to leave us tired and ready for bed.

“Did you have a fun evening” your wife asks you.

“Yeah it was great!” you reply. It may not have been ancient rome, but it was close enough.

It is funny to note that boxing is an accepted sport in the world where men agree that it is better that someone beats someone up in a ring than on the streets! The difference, please? Oh yes, sorry; one is sport where you can win money or a medal, the other is assault, and you can win yourself a jail sentence!

Of course not all sport is as bloodthirsty as boxing; we also engage in rugby and football, where the aim of the game is to get a small ball into the other team's goal, and if we manage it, the crowds go wild! There is shouting and singing, and baiting of the other teams supporters, and we may even engage in physical violence against them, it all depends on how we are feeling!

We love to cheer our team on don't we. We want to see them win! We want to see the other team “defeated.” We may not be on the pitch but we can feel the adrenaline coursing through our veins as if we were playing. If we are successful we go back home with our male urges satisfied.

Some sports don't require us to compete in a team, but individually such as running, hammer throwing, javelin etc. but the object is still to win – to be the fastest, or the one with the longest throw, or jump, and once again the crowds cheer us on. Winning, that is all that's important.

So perhaps modern day sports aren't so far removed from the games of ancient rome, they are just should we say “different” in that the aim is just the beating your opponent not actually killing him.

My team vs. your team, my gun against the deer, my boxer vs. your boxer, my country vs. your country. We love sport don't we! It keeps us alive. It makes us feel as if we are back a million years, out hunting animals for something to eat. Except we aren't. We are a modern animal with no need to hunt anymore, so we find our “pleasure” or at least find a way to release built up energy in other ways, but the motivation is the same. To hunt. To subdue the prey. We have just invented a modern way to do it.

The fairer species

“Oh, she looks just lovely” you say, as you see your daughter all dressed up in her wedding dress ready to be “given away” (as if she were an offering) to the man she loves. She has beautiful hair, beautiful make-up and she looks so elegant. You feel so proud. You have brought up this young girl to be a woman, and now she will start a family of her own.

Back in the old days when the role of a woman was clearly defined as the bearer and nurturer of the children things were a lot easier. Neither the male brain nor the female brain had developed its higher abilities, and we were just like the animals. We had sex, the woman got pregnant, the man brought in the food and the women prepared it and looked after the children. Easy! But as our minds developed, and we created modern societies, something changed.

The woman's mind is inquisitive as the man's, she yearns to find out more, to understand, like men do, but her role has been cast in stone, by men, at the time of the cavemen. It's no wonder that women want to go out to work and to be “equal” to men because funnily enough, they are.

Men have always called women the weaker, or fairer sex, but just because they don't have the same size frame or muscle density that men have, doesn't mean they are not as capable of doing exactly what men do (and better). Whilst in thailand recently I noticed that most of the workers on one building site were women, something that would never be allowed in western society.

“Women are here to look after the house and the children. It is their role,” say the men. But in asia, I noticed women out working in the fields with their infants on their backs (and probably going home to cook the dinner and look after the house after work).

Roles? What roles?

So why is it that we have such a division of the sexes? Why are women deemed to be weak and helpless? It is obvious to me, from observing women in many countries, that they have the same abilities as men. Ok, so they may not be able to lift quite as much as men, but what does that matter?

Unfortunately women have been stereotyped by men in an attempt to subdue them and control them just as they used to subdue their prey.

Women have been brought up playing with dolls and “girly” things to make them think they are different to men. “Girls wear pink and are princesses,” says your mother as she starts her motherly duty of conditioning you to your fate. “One day you will meet a nice man, and he will sweep you off your feet and marry you.” That is what you've got to look forward to.

Even in an age where parents say that education is important, they still hope their daughters will be married off to some wealthy man who will “provide” for her and the children. All she will have to do is spend a lifetime doing washing and cleaning and looking after the kids. And she should be happy! Because the man is “providing” for her, so she never has to worry about anything!

Poor weak women. They can't do anything on their own. They have to spend their childhoods wrapped up in cotton wool, just in case! But what nonsense is this? This is man's nonsense. This is ideology created by powerful men who want to remain powerful. Men who want to rule and conquer, men like the heads of the church and other religious organisations, men who tell their women to “cover up,” men who want their children to remain virgins until they are “married.”

Let's face it, men just want to rule everything, and they won't let anyone get in their way, especially, the fairer sex.

In Victorian times, in Britain, women were told “this is men's talk!” and they were sent off to talk about how pretty the curtains were in the dining room, whilst the men went off to talk about politics and war! What would women know of such things? They were here to bear children and keep the house clean, that was all. Oh, and to look pretty for their husbands. It makes me sick to even think of men at the moment, and I'm a man!

As we saw in the first paragraph, men and women are almost identical. But I think at one time they even said that women's brains were smaller! Even if it could be true physically, psychologically there is no difference. It's just that men want them to be different. They want women to be weaker because it gives them power.

More recently women have woken up to this, and have demanded a bit more equality, especially after they noticed they were being paid less than men and not reaching the positions men had. But can you not understand why? Men don't want women anywhere near their power structure so they invent all sorts of idiotic reasons why men are better equipped for high powered work than women. Unfortunately, women have had to start behaving like men in order to acquire these positions which is a shame, but understandable.

So women! Who are you? What's your role in life? Is it to grow up wearing dresses and playing with dolls, careful not to get any scratches on you in case you blemish your perfect skin? Are you destined to become a wife of a man, and “bear him” children? Are you someone else's property? Are you a lesser homo sapiens than a male? I think not.

And how many women start pub fights, go to boxing matches or start wars. Ok, so some do, but that is probably because their mind is telling them that in order to compete with men they have to act like them. So women join the army etc. but it is still men who are in charge.

Wherever you look in the world there is a powerful man standing over everyone, especially women. He may say he agrees with more equality for women, but only if it doesn't compromise his position of power.

Conditioning

To see where we have all gone wrong, we are going to have to look to our friend conditioning.

As soon as a child is born, he or she starts being conditioned by his or her parents. Men want a boy so they can carry the on family name (and genes), and women want girls so they can have someone to share “girly” experiences with, someone who will one day be a “wife” (what an aspiration), and society backs them up with media conditioning, educational conditioning and religious conditioning.

And from day one they become “Male” or “Female.” I am not talking about their biological sex either. Each of the sexes comes with a whole host of expectations from parents, because they “know” what a boy should “be” and what a girl should “be.” For example, boys should wear blue, and girls wear pink. Girls should play with dolls, and boys should play with action figures. Girls should play soft games and boys

should play rough games – and woe betide any child who crosses these boundaries.

Girls and boys should stay in their own compartments during the conditioning process in case anything goes wrong. Girls must wear dresses, boys must wear trousers. Girls who want to play rugby are ridiculed as being less than female, and boys who want to learn ballet are ridiculed as being less than male. But what is ridiculous to me is how stupid parents are that they just allow their children to be conditioned like this (oh, I forgot, they have been conditioned which is a form of brainwashing).

Who says a boy can't wear a dress! It was good enough for the romans and we saw how vicious they were. Who says a boy can't do ballet? Some of the greatest dancers in the world have been men (sorry ladies). But this is so much more than just what we wear or what we do, it is that thanks to conditioning we never really get to see individuals. Girls vs. boys. Always. And that, sadly is one of the greatest divisions of all.

One mind

So who are the boys without the conditioning? Who are the girls without the conditioning? What if you don't give your son an action figure or a police car to play with? Will he grow up to be less of a man? What if you don't give your daughter a doll to play with, will she grow up to be less of a woman? Of course not. Remember the only difference is in sexual biology. Nothing more. Ok, so women may be more emotional than men but again it is only the sexual hormones acting. When it comes down to it, we are all of the same mind.

“But surely, all a little girl dreams of is setting up home and getting married and looking after the house,” say some of you. But who tells her that is what she should do? You do! You the society. You the parent. You the magazines.

We all know that children's minds are easily moulded and adults make the best of this by conditioning their children to conform to their expected roles in the society! Stop doing it. Stop forcing someone to be something they are not. In time, a boy will find a girl to make a child with. In time, a girl will find a boy to have a child with. That is as far as it goes. Do you not understand?

Biologists say we are a species which sets up pair-bonds for life, but that is just conditioning again. When you are young, if someone tells you you will find someone and stay with them for the rest of your life, you believe them and you start preparing yourself for that role.

We all have the same mind, a universal mind. We are all capable of great learning and great discoveries. There is no sexual boundary, do you understand. The mind is open.

It is you the society who close it; who tell it how to act, what to do, what to say, and let's face it, no one has a clue what the mind should be or could be, just how they want it to be, so that it fits in, it conforms to the society and everyone can say: “Oh, he's such a nice man, he has a good job now and a lovely wife at home wit the children! It makes me sick to think about what the powerful and the stupid have done with our children's minds by brainwashing them into believing that they have to behave a certain way, because they are “female” as in “that's not very lady-like.”

So what are “ladies” supposed to be like? Slim, well dressed, polite, able to talk about things but not too much, reserved? What utter nonsense, but it doesn't mean they should try to be like boys either any more than boys should try to be like girls, do you see? In order to find out who men and women really are we must break through all the conditioning.

The battle of the sexes is all nonsense, a myth invented to keep us separate so that men could reign supreme. Self-help books will tell you there is no way men will ever understand women. What utter nonsense! Men don't understand themselves, that is, their real selves, because they have been so conditioned in the society, and the same goes for women. These books will tell you “facts” about women and men, but they are not truth, they are books to help you live “happily” within your conditioned roles. Do you understand? They will tell you men are solution oriented and women just need someone to listen to them. They will help you solve relationship problems like “why does my man always leave the toilet seat up?” by explaining something in the man's brain that is different to the women's when the answer should be “because his dad left it up too!”

We must start to see that men and women are in relationship but not as a couple. That is just society

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

telling us we should settle down and live with the same partner forever! Who says? Society does. It is no more biological than brushing your teeth!

We both contain an amazing mind, and although we both perform different functions during the child making, and rearing process, our minds are the same. We are both connected to the universal, we are both capable of great love and great compassion, but men have been conditioned to think that they should lock it up. Men have been conditioned to think that they are violent and war-like, but just because you have bigger muscles than females, doesn't mean you are violent, or you like boxing or going hunting to explore your caveman past! That is society acting upon your mind.

And just because you may be slender in figure than men doesn't mean you should be cleaning all day, changing nappies, and looking after your husband. Men don't have to be more feminine, and women don't have to be more masculine. The balance can only be found through deep awareness of self.

It is time to break free for all of us, but to do that we must challenge society. We must challenge the roles they have set for us. And most of all, we must challenge the powerful who set these roles. How do we do that? By using our minds. By opening them to insight. By allowing nature in.

And if you tell me here that you like your role in life, I will only have to assume you are happy to stay asleep forever.

Close the division
Challenge your role
Challenge society
Challenge your parents
Challenge your mind

[Back to Index](#)

Mental Health

1. *The psychological state of someone who is functioning at a satisfactory level of emotional and behavioural adjustment*

I don't know if you've ever known anyone who is suffering from an illness of the mind? The problem is, you can't see it can you? You may notice someone's behaviour is not quite what you would expect, but it's not a broken leg, or a broken arm; it's not even noticeable like cancer or a tumour. To the naked eye, and even to the surgeon's eye, it is invisible. Maybe that's why we stigmatise it so much. We are afraid to discuss it. Instead of it being treated like any other illness, it is almost seen as a character deficiency, or a weakness.

What do you think? What should we do with the mentally ill? Try to cure them? lock them up? Keep them away from other people?

What is “normal?”

Let's start this discussion by trying to find out what mental illness really is. The dictionary definition of mental health is “*The psychological state of someone who is functioning at a satisfactory level of emotional and behavioural adjustment.*” I'm not sure who is responsible for defining what is satisfactory, but one would assume that this is the term used to describe someone who is “Normal,” i.e. free from any mental difficulties, as defined by the psychiatric manual the doctors are using at the time. But who is normal? You? Me?

I have had many mental difficulties over the years. I have suffered from terrible anxiety which caused me to act impulsively, spoiling relationships with friends, and losing jobs I liked. I have suffered panic attacks in the past, and used to get weird thoughts in my brain from time to time... Crazy? I don't think I am. In fact I would consider myself very normal.

Would you consider yourself normal? Do you feel depressed at times, have you ever had suicidal thoughts? Have you been anxious, paranoid, or extremely fearful at any time in your life? If the answer is yes, you should at least talk to someone you can trust, whether that be a family member, or find a helpline if you have one in your local directory, or just go and talk to your family doctor. If you are suffering in any way, get some assistance. Just don't do what I did, and wait for nearly twelve years before telling someone.

I suffered in complete silence, afraid that people would mock me. I was embarrassed by the whole thing. Me, suffering from a problem with my mind? Don't make me laugh! I'm joe cool, mr confident, mr arrogant, a hit with the ladies, always ready for a laugh, always funny and happy. What would my friends think? I couldn't let them see me like this, terrified, shaking, with sweating palms, ready to escape at a moments notice. Always on the look out for a “what if” situation, always seeing the negative in everything.

Except I wasn't like that, I knew I wasn't. I did like to have fun, I did like to enjoy myself and be happy. I didn't want to be afraid, and in fact I never actually knew what I was afraid of. It wasn't anything in particular, just a general sense of foreboding, a general unease about myself, a feeling that everything was going to go wrong, and I was going to die in some terrible accident.

The first time I had a panic attack I was in Sweden on business, and the next day I flew home to my mum in England instead of returning to my job in Paris. Three days later I managed to get on a plane back to Paris, but only to empty my apartment and drive home to England. I did go to see my doctor, but his advice was, “pull yourself together,” which wasn't very helpful, and I couldn't do. So I never returned to the medical profession for help; instead I turned to a different doctor to get my medicine – the publican.

I would drink myself into a complete state as often as my body would allow, in order to quell the anxiety I was feeling. Looking back, I don't know how I kept it up, although the more I drank in the evening, the more anxious I would become in the morning, thereby creating a self-reinforcing cycle. The more anxious I felt, the more I drank, and the more I drank the more anxious I felt! I couldn't win, but I passed off the heavy drinking as just *fun*. Even when people began to notice that I was going to the pub more and more often, I just carried on regardless.

It was only four and a half years ago that I finally plucked up the courage to go and see someone, although not a medical doctor. I went to see a hypnotherapist, who didn't diagnose me, but merely tried to fix the supposed problem with my father. Nonetheless, I felt better after each and every session.

Unfortunately, this was a time when I was travelling the world and was not in a position to stay in one place long enough to continue seeing the same therapist.

I was desperately trying to find an answer, until eventually, I came up with it on my own (or so I thought).

I believed I was suffering from obsessive compulsive disorder, and as such, went through a course of self-help and felt a lot better at the end. It was only on seeing a psychologist that she pointed out that I was most definitely not obsessive compulsive!

Anxiety disorder, attention deficit disorder, alcohol addiction. I've been through the works, and no one was able to give me a firm answer about what I might be suffering from. I have done most of the research myself, and although I could not say I am one hundred percent, I feel so much better by just being aware of myself, aware of my thoughts, my feelings and my actions. All I can say to you is if you feel anything out of the ordinary (that is what *you* term to be ordinary, not someone else) please, please speak to someone. Look on the internet, test yourself on one of many psychological quizzes. Just do something. Don't let yourself be a prisoner of your own mind. Reach out, and ask for help.

What I have been talking about here is a minor mental illness, although it has caused me many major difficulties in life, ones I would have preferred not to have experienced. The feelings were uncomfortable, but I want to share it with all of you here, as I think it is of the utmost importance that people know that having mental illness is something you share with millions of people around the world – it is not something we have to hide from others. In fact, the more people are aware of mental illness, the less of a stigma there will be attached to having it.

The brain is a hugely complex organ. It has taken millions of years to evolve. There are millions of different connections, all working together to make us what we are today, so is it any wonder that people are suffering from wiring faults? I find it amazing that most of us function as well as we do. Given the chance for error, don't you think we are truly amazing? I do.

So it makes me sad when I see other people who are suffering from mental difficulties, and this time I am not talking about minor anxieties; these are illnesses that make people kill themselves, where they hear voices that tell them to kill other people. Illnesses, like schizophrenia, for example.

In the topic "suicide," I talked about a friend of my girlfriend who swallowed a bottle of pills, cut her wrists and casually walked out of a sixth floor window, and later had no recollection of the event (she survived, and was diagnosed schizophrenic) Or the friend who thought that there was a conspiracy against him, and gassed himself in his car.

Mental illness is something that concerns us all, it's not something that alcoholics, weirdos, and drug addicts get, it's something that can affect every one of us. From our parents, to our partners; from our close friends to our children. That's not to say we should be watching everybody close to us to make sure they are not mentally ill, far from it, but we should learn to be aware of ourselves and others around us, so we may better understand if they are having difficulties. All too often we judge people quickly and criticise them, without knowing what is going on in their minds.

We have to learn to listen to people more, and listen with an open heart, not a critical one; only then we may gain some insight into difficulties they may be having. You probably know someone who is suffering at the moment, but they may never let on for fear of embarrassment. Remember when you look at someone and judge them, that they may be suffering inside. Try to be patient, try to empathise a little, try to help a little, try to show a little compassion.

**

Last week, I went to see my uncle in hospital. He is 76, but up until two months ago, he was living a perfectly happy, balanced life, with his wife, enjoying his grandchildren; then he fell downstairs one night, and suffered a massive stroke which brought on a form of dementia (*mental deterioration of organic or functional origin*). I don't know if you have ever known anyone with this, but it is the most heartbreaking thing to witness.

My uncle and I had always shared a laugh together, and I have shared many summers with he and his wife, so coming to visit him was a real shock to me. Overnight, he didn't know anybody. He didn't know his own wife and children, he didn't recognise my mother (his sister), or me. He had no idea where he was and he seemed to be in a great deal of distress. He was incontinent and had to wear a nappy, both things a grown man would find highly embarrassing, but his mind had gone. He was in his own world, detached from reality.

How sad it was for me to think I could never have a joke with him again, couldn't speak to him on the phone, and would never be able to share a normal conversation. Overnight, all that was gone. He was taken away to a dark place which the doctors say he is unlikely to ever come out of.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

He would never go back to the home he had built with his wife. He would never again sit in his armchair, watch tv, or play the guitar he loved so. He is destined to be put into a home with other dementia sufferers, where they will never interact with each other the way that most of us can. That is the end, he is now closed off from this world. There is no cure for this. No magic pill, no magic operation that will have him back to us laughing and smiling.

My aunt was also diagnosed several years ago with dementia. She too sits in a home, taking her medication several times a day to keep her calm. Although she doesn't know she is in a home, she can actually have a conversation. She can laugh, and enjoy spending time with us, but only for a short moment, before she forgets who we are, and we have to start all over again, but at least it's something, to get a glimmer of the person we used to know and still love.

I share this with you only because we take our minds and brains for granted. We do not ever think that anything bad can happen to them; we just assume everything will always be all right, and they will continue to function as normal until the day we die.

Just imagine losing your mind, right now. Imagine who you would be without a healthy mind? Yet every day we poison it with drugs, alcohol, and hateful words. It's not just the parts of the body you can see that you need to take care of, without proper brain function, you won't be able to walk, talk or control your bladder. Think about it for a moment.

We must not only try to understand the working of the human mind, but look after it as well. Nurture it with kindness and good food! Use it only for peaceful, non stressful activities, do not poison it with hate and violence. Treat it with respect. It is the only one you've got. No brain transplants I'm afraid. When this ones done, that's your lot!

We have to remember that it is only over the last century we have started to gain some knowledge of psychological and neurological disorders, with doctors having started to learn how to treat these illnesses; but we are a long way from understanding the brain in its entirety. But understand it we must.

It is from our mind that hate, violence, greed, lies, extremism, war and power come. You may not think that someone who hates, or is violent and willing to torture his fellow man because he comes from a different country is mental illness, but remember back to when you were born.

Remember your formative years, when the world was a happy place for you, where you enjoyed life, where you loved, and now think about your life now. *Any* thinking that is not love must mean that the mind has become sick. Do you agree? You may think I have gone a little crazy to suggest such a thing, but think about it if you will for a moment.

The mind you are born with, the natural mind that contains no violence, changes as you get older. You are conditioned by your peers, your classmates, your parents, and the television you watch, and you fall into a set way of thinking. You are not a free thinker.

If you hate pakistanis, or muslims, or hate americans, or british people, do you not think that your mind is just a little bit sick? Not because of who you hate, but that you hate at all. There is no reason for hate, it is irrational, as are all violent thoughts.

Man is the most intelligent species on the planet remember, we are supposed to be above the animals, yet we behave worse than them. If our minds are what controls our actions, then I am sorry to say that I believe most people are mentally ill on this planet!

You don't have to agree with me, in fact I don't want you to. I want you to sit down and take a good look at your own mind. Forget checking to see if you are depressed, or anxious or stressed. I want you to examine in microscopic detail the thoughts that come out of your mind. Check yourselves against the immovable benchmarks of love, compassion and empathy. See how your thinking checks out. See whether you believe war is righteous, racism and hatred is acceptable, anger and violence is ok. While you're at it, check out your opinions on guns as well.

This is not a psychological test to see whether you are in fact in need of medical attention, I purely wish to show you that even those who believe they are perfectly “normal” should do an mental evaluation of themselves. The more you look into yourselves, the more you will see that your definition of “normal” doesn't match up with my definition. I don't want you to agree with me, merely to explore your mind.

Dictionary Definition: Normal (*being approximately average or within certain limits*)

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

My Definition: Normal (*one who is compassionate, loving, and empathic to all living creatures on this planet, who respects his environment and respects others rights to live a peaceful life free from fear and violence*)

How did you score? Are you normal?

Look after your mind – Keep it healthy
for all our sakes

[Back to Index](#)

Monarchy

1. *An autocracy (a political system governed by a single individual) governed by a monarch who usually inherits the authority*

Who are these people? Have you ever given any thought to it? Who are these people happily waving to you from the balconies of their palace. Waving and smiling to you from their limousines? Happily, we wave back, waving our flags, holding pictures of the king or queen high above our heads. Waving and smiling as they pass. Then they are gone.

?

Let me ask you another question. In what regard do you hold the king and queen (if you do not have a monarchy, maybe try to imagine this question). Do you like them? Do you revere them or fear them? What do you like or love about your monarch? Some may answer, “they hold the country together,” “they maintain stability,” “it gives the people something to feel good about in themselves,” or simply “they are good for business,” and, “they bring in a lot of tourists.” But the question I asked you was, in what regard do you hold them?

They have not been elected by a democratic system, and they are not writing government policy. They do not improve your employment hopes, or give you better health care. They do not pay your heating bill for you when you are old, or buy food for you when you are poor; yet still you wave your flags. In some countries it is almost treasonable to speak out against the king or queen, yet they do nothing for you.

Let us go into this a little more deeply shall we? One or two people – who have not been elected – are fabulously wealthy and privileged, do nothing directly for the people, are revered and respected. They wave to us occasionally, and we feel happy. Now I am not anti-monarchy or republican, I just want to understand with you who these people are.

Let’s go back into history when kings and queens were much more powerful than they are today. They ruled with an iron fist, levied taxes from everyone, and waged war against everyone who opposed them. This was a time when kings and queens were respected, both out of fear, and for embodying everything that was strong and great about the country. The national flag was raised in battle, “for king and for country.” The bonding of your nation against another. The pride in your nation. The pride in something bigger than yourself. The pride to belong.

Let’s quickly fast forward to today shall we? A time when politicians can be replaced every four or five years. Compare that to the monarchs who happily pass down their titles (have you ever considered where these titles came from, and who awarded them), and their castles, and their land, and their jewels, and fine arts, to the next in line in their immediate, or extended family. All very nice. Yet no one really complains.

There haven’t been revolutions against the monarchy for many years, but if someone earns a lot running a big business all the workers and unions are up in arms, calling for their resignation; yet this doesn’t seem to happen to the monarchy.

If you look at a prince, king or queen closely enough, I mean really examine him or her, what would they look like? Different to you and me? Maybe more expensive clothes, more expensive perfume, more expensive shoes. But if you took all that away, and stood naked next to a king, would you look different? I hope the answer you all come up with is no, because that is precisely the point. As humans, we are the same. Yet you are a king, and I am a factory worker. You are above me, and I respect you. I will wave my flag and smile broadly as you pass, happy to know you gave some of your valued time to share with me.

To suggest you would respect someone you don’t know, not because they have done great things for humanity (most have not, as you will see from their great wealth), but because someone tells you he is the king, or head of your country seems a little ludicrous to me, but then, what do I know?

So who are they? They are not individuals. They are the country; the nation. We love them, because we love our country. We don’t care that they have more money or finer jewels than us, we love them, because in times of crisis they stand up and represent the hopes and fears of every citizen. They exist for the good of the country. They show the other countries we are powerful as a nation, and we are proud to belong. In short, this is no different to ancient times. The king is the embodiment of the nation.

So why do we still have kings and queens?

It’s quite simple really. We are nationalistic. We love our country, we believe our country is superior to

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

any other, and as we are only individual citizens, we need to have pride – not in ourselves – but in something greater than all of us. The nation, represented by the flag and ultimately the king and queen. That's why they need to keep the monarchy in one family, with the title being passed from one family member to another. They must have continuity.

How many politicians come and go? Do you even remember their names? The politicians who work so very hard for you to give you healthcare, employment, pensions when you're old. Do we care about them? Do we happily smile and wave our flags for them? No, of course we don't. We *need* to believe in something greater, something eternal, something that will carry on even if one member dies.

We need to believe in something more powerful than ourselves. Something that makes us feel happier, something that makes us feel that the effort we put in every day is worth it. That one thing is the king or queen. The country. The embodiment of nationalism.

Some countries have voted for a republic, for a president; and when the president, the leader of the country comes past, we happily wave our flags and smile, proud to be part of the great nation. It makes no difference if it is a king or a queen, or a president. Only when we start to forget the nation as all important, and start to think more about the world (*worldism, the term that doesn't exist*), will we ever have a strong need to say to our monarchs: "Thank you, we don't need your services anymore."

*I dedicate myself to you my monarch.
I will labour for you,
give up my life for you,
I will respect and honour you.
For you, are the country I love.*

*I will wave to you, buy flowers to present to you.
you are so much more than I.
I do not deserve your friendship,
but I am grateful that you shake my hand.*

*I know you do not toil in the fields,
or have callouses in your hands.
I know you dress in finest silks,
but still I smile and raise my flag
For you are the country I love.*

[Back to Index](#)

Money

1. *The most common medium of exchange; functions as legal tender*

The most valuable topic in the book! And if you buy this book you will pay money for it, I will receive money for it. I can then spend it on whatever I please (after tax of course), and the government can spend my money on anything it pleases, and the world will keep going round.

“Money makes the world go round” goes a well known saying (but hasn't it got more to do with gravity?) Whatever the case it seems we can't exist without money and it would be a foolish man to suggest we could. Money is how we pay for things. Full stop.

So how much money is there in the world? 100 trillion, 900 zillion? I don't have the figures to hand but I am guessing that it's a lot. But money could be anything, it could be gold, stones; in fact, it could be anything given to someone else in exchange for goods or services, just as long as the recipient can then use it to pay for something else.

Trees have monetary value but you can't keep them under your bed. Land has monetary value but you can't put it in the bank. No, there has to be something that is easily transportable that everyone accepts. Money was the answer. Notes and coins issued by the government, with a well known face on them, and a number to represent what they were worth. But as we all know, just because a note says one million rupees, doesn't mean we are rich, far from it.

Thanks to international exchange rates (*the charge for exchanging currency of one country for currency of another*) and inflation (*a general and progressive increase in prices*) your one million rupees might just buy you a loaf of bread, but one million dollars might buy you a nice ranch in the united states, or a large town in a poor country. It all depends on what your money is worth in the country you take it to.

When I was in thailand, I was amazed at what 300 baht could buy – a nice hotel for the night for two people, or two days food for two people. Translated into pounds, it was about £4.00! Four pounds! That would perhaps buy you a pint and a half of beer, or a sandwich and a packet of crisps. It was so cheap! In fact we only had to work for a short time in britain to be able to live comfortably in thailand for many months. So you can see why so many people head to the cheap countries with their money.

The problem is, they're not cheap for the people, and a labourer might have to work for a couple of days to earn 300 baht. Then he would have to pay rent, and food and clothes for himself and perhaps his family. So when we say a country is cheap, we must remember it is cheap for us, thanks to the good rate of exchange we are getting, but can you imagine how long a thai labourer would have to work for to go on a two week holiday to the uk? Probably several years! So it's clear to see that the world is imbalanced monetarily, but it only really starts to show up when you move between countries.

If you live in the usa, maybe you think that everyone has the same lifestyle as you do, or perhaps you think that the people of thailand would be better off if they just worked a bit harder. But it seems that no matter how hard they work, they stay poor.

“It's because they have a weak economy,” insist some of you, “if the government managed the economy of the country better it would only be a matter of time until they were as wealthy as us.”

Rich man pays poor man, poor man pays poorer man, poorer man pays poorest man.

If you live in one of the western “developed” (rich) nations you may have noticed that your country has started importing much of the products from overseas, especially consumer goods and food. Why do you think that is? Is it that they are being compassionate and helping out a friend in need. Unfortunately not. What they are doing is using the favourable exchange rates to pay less for their goods than they would if they were manufactured in the west.

Even technology companies are starting to move their customer services operations to places like india, so that you phone a local number and through the magic of modern telecommunications, your call is diverted to bangalore, without you even noticing! Why do they do this? Is it because of the wonderful customer service skills they have in Bangalore or is it that they can pay someone £5.00 per day instead of paying someone in the uk £50.00? Pretty obvious, no?

So as a country becomes wealthier, and their economy grows stronger they “outsource” some of the more

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

labour intensive tasks to poorer people (what would they do if we didn't provide them with jobs eh?) but then something interesting starts happening. As a poor country starts developing economically they in return become richer, and start employing people from a poorer country than themselves, for you know, "labour intensive tasks."

But the question I want to ask is: What happens when all the poor countries have become rich? Is it possible? Or to be rich, does someone else need to be poor? You see, the way the system works makes it impossible for everyone to be rich. So it starts at the top with £100.00 pounds per hour, and then there is a sliding scale down to the bottom at £5.00 pounds per hour. It is economically impossible for everyone to be paid £100.00 pounds per hour, and if they were, no one would be rich, everyone would be the same, but now £100.00 pounds wouldn't be worth as much as it used to be. Do you see?

Someone always has to pay the cost, and at the moment, it is the economically stagnant countries. Bring in the world bank.

World Bank, World Saviour?

1. *World Bank: A United Nations agency created to assist developing nations by loans guaranteed by member governments*

So in order to stimulate economic growth the world bank loans money to economically and normally socially unstable countries under the pretext of helping them become wealthy "just like us," but then they saddle them with crippling interest rates they can barely afford to pay back, meaning that the countries who have loaned the money get rich off the interest rates, and the poor countries get poorer. Just the way we like it. Greed, pretending to be compassion!

Not everyone's going to be rich stop fooling yourselves

It's a trick, a con by powerful magicians, making you see what they want you to see. You are enslaved to the rich, doing their bidding, so they can get richer. You don't seriously think they would let you get rich, do you? Who would make all the cheap products for their consumers? Perhaps we can enslave the monkeys, and teach them to make jeans and t-shirts for the masses, after all we would only have to pay them peanuts! (sorry for the pun)

Maybe all this searching for extra terrestrial life is actually a cover to find some new race of people that the rich can exploit before their cover is blown on this planet. But their cover is blown, we see what they're up to, but unfortunately it's not them that are the problem, it's us.

We want to be rich, we don't want to spend our money, we want to hoard it for ourselves, and although we may know in the back of our mind that someone is being exploited we shrug it off and say "at least they've got jobs. If the west didn't give them jobs, who would." And so we greedily rush through the clothes stores saying: "WOW! Jeans £4.00? I'll take three pairs."

The poor are working for us. It's just we can't hear or see them because they are thousands of miles away. Can you imagine the uproar that would be caused if we paid children a pound a day to work twelve hours in a sweat shop (*factory where workers do piecework for poor pay and are prevented from forming unions; common in the clothing industry*). We wouldn't let it happen.

Celebrity campaigners do all they can to raise awareness of these issues and all credit to them but unfortunately, they can't change the world. You see, we are all on a collision course that may take ten years or fifty years, but come it will, when the poor realise they are still poor, and they have been conned (yet again).

But what is this desperate desire for a good quality of life, for economic riches, is it not greed on everyone's part. You see, the poor people are under the illusion that to be rich is better, but as the monks will tell you, they are quite happy leading a simple life, with simple food and accommodation. They are not unhappy. In fact, most of them will tell you they love life. But we are shown people in desperate "need," and

we think: “poor people, if only they had better jobs and a better economy, they too could have what we have.” Which is?

Let us turn our attention to the continent of africa, long touted as being one of the poorest places on earth; we regularly see video of people starving, people walking a mile to get water, who live in mud huts. How sorry we feel for them, and how sorry they must feel for themselves. But hang on, we've said it before, haven't these people been survivors throughout history? Have they not been quite content with their lives? I believe they (and us) were quite content with life in general, until someone told them they shouldn't have to live like this – that it was “unnatural for a man to live in nature, off the land,” that we were “a civilised species, and we should live in brick houses with air conditioning and satellite tv, and we should go on holiday and go out for meals.”

Well, you can just imagine what happened. People thought that that was what they should do, so they left their villages in search of this money so they could have all the things they were told they needed, but quickly found out that the cost of getting these things, was the cultivation of desire and greed, and disappointment at not being able to get the money only lead to suffering.

But by now they were hooked. They had given up their simple way of life (which if you remember the monks seemed quite happy with), and were landed in cities ready to be exploited by each and every rich and powerful person. Kept in a virtual prison, where the only (supposed) escape was to keep working for as many hours as possible. But in the end they never escaped.

Let's help the poor, buy more stuff

We have already heard it said, by certain people, that by outsourcing the manual labour to poor countries, we will help them become wealthier, so does that mean we have to produce more and more stuff we don't need – a process that is already taking a terrible toll on our limited resources? Are we saying that economic development in the “developing” world is dependent on mass consumerism? Let me get this straight. We must make more, so we can help more? Is that right?

But we only want to pay these countries a fraction of what we sell them for in our own shops (it's not us... exchange rates dear boy, exchange rates...). And they will get money, so they can build cities just like ours, so they can go shopping all the time, and waste even more resources? Is that what we want? We want everyone in the world to have a car, and a mobile phone and have access to junk food, and consumer electronics. Is that what we really want?

I think that some people think it is. And it will be a sad day when everyone becomes just like us, because I'll tell you one thing. If everyone consumed resources like the australians the british, the americans, and the other “rich” countries the world as we know it would collapse. The oil would run out, the gas would run out. There would be nothing left to exploit! Do you understand how serious this is?

We are saying that the people in the developing world should have access to a lifestyle like ours but the cost of this happening is the collapse of our own lifestyles, and I'll tell you something, the political and business leaders of the west know that. They know that the developing countries can never be allowed to have everything we have otherwise it would spell doom for us all. So we set up world banks and aid agencies and we pretend to help, but secretly we make sure they never reach our standard of living. We are just the moneylender, the shylock greedily rubbing his hands together, after making yet another “compassionate” loan to the “third world.”

But on a last note, what's so great about our standard of living anyway? We only need clothes, shelter and food to have a happy life, the rest is pure greed. Why do people aspire to living a superficial life? Because it looks good to have (on paper) I think the monks might be on to something, so I might throw in my lot with them rather than mr world bank, and if I need to know what world economics really is about, I just have to turn on a tv.

Some people say that money is the root of all evil, but there's no such thing as evil. Greed and desire wants money, lots of it, but once your mind sees through that, things start to fall back into place, and who knows, maybe you would like to try living without money for a while. I bet it's not as bad as people make out. But if you become attached to it, being without it is probably one of the loneliest places to be in the

universe.

*Break free of desire and greed,
and then see how much money you want.
Being poor is a state of mind.
Think about it.*

“But they are poor, they are,” cry the celebrity campaigners, as they travel from village to village in their jeeps and their sunglasses. “If only they had what we had, they would know what it really is like to be happy. We must get more money for them, it's the only way out.”

Is it?

[Back to Index](#)

Music

1. *An artistic form of auditory communication incorporating instrumental or vocal tones in a structured and continuous manner*
2. *Any agreeable (pleasing and harmonious) sounds*

Most people love music don't they? I know I do. I like blues, rock and roll, classical, electronica, folk, and jazz, but I'm not so keen on boy bands, country and western, or rock. Some people only like rock, death metal, and grunge, others only like cheery pop songs, others opera, but it's all music. Some we like, some we don't.

More than anything else, music has the ability to stir up emotions, such as when we hear a rousing ballad, or when we hear a song we used to listen to when we were in love with someone.

Music and the emotions are wholeheartedly connected. A film without music just isn't the same. A horror is not really "horrifying" unless you hear the screech of the violins, and who would feel a tear well in their eye if the music wasn't just right, at the moment the stars of the love story kiss for the first time?

All this music can play havoc with the emotions. For some reason, it seems to connect, able to communicate complex emotions without words. It is in essence a language on its own, able to do what a thousand words cannot. How is it possible that the plucking of guitar strings in a certain combination can produce such emotions? After all, it is only a tightly wound piece of metal attached to a wooden box (sorry to over simplify it) tuned (*adjust the pitches of musical instruments*), and plucked, or strummed, by someone skilled in the art of the guitar. Let us find out why music affects us so much and what its connection is to our minds, and perhaps the universe!

My family have always had music playing in the house. My dad always liked jazz music, and my dad thought that my mum liked country and western, and that's what he bought her, when in fact she liked jazz! It's no wonder they divorced.

Like most teenagers, I only liked popular music, as that is what everyone in my peer group liked (no doubt I would have liked opera if that's what it took to get me accepted into the in-group), and I never really paid that much attention to what my parents were playing, until the year that my father decided to leave my mother. It was at this time that I noticed a distinct change in the type of music being played.

I can remember coming home from school sometimes, and my mother would be sitting in the lounge, drinking sherry, and listening to a song by a depressing irish duo whose name escapes me. There she would sit, hour after hour, day after day listening to this same song, crying.

I used to ask her: "mum, can't you turn this music off, it's so depressing."

To which she would reply, "no leave it on, it's nice," when it was so obviously helping keep her in a state of melancholy.

She played the same song for several years after my father left, sitting in the same chair crying. She wouldn't listen to anything happy or upbeat, although whilst we were still a family, she always listened to up-tempo stuff. She was, I think, using the music to adjust her emotions, or perhaps it was the other way round, but she was sad, so she needed something to help keep her in that state.

Music was the answer. She didn't want to break out of the sad state, and in a way, the chords, and therefore the vibrations, were affecting her, not only psychologically, but physically. She didn't turn on the tv and watch a soap opera, or listen to a talk show on the radio. The only thing she wanted to do was listen to a specific type of music.

What do you think? Do you ever listen to music to put yourself in a specific physical state? When you are going out to a party, what sort of music do you put on before you go? Is it slow and emotionally depressing, or is it fun and upbeat? When you are having a romantic evening with your girlfriend or boyfriend, with candles and a nice bottle of wine, do you put on dance music? No, I think it's fair to say that we choose music that fits our "mood," (*a characteristic (habitual or relatively temporary) state of feeling*). When the mood passes we change the music.

Some of you may say: "I just put on music I like, it doesn't matter what mood I'm in," but if you watch yourself carefully in the moment, you may see something interesting happening.

When you work out at the gym, and your heartbeat is high and the blood is pumping, do you listen to classical or opera? I don't think so. We need music at a certain tempo in a certain rhythm to help keep us focussed on the task. The same goes for when we feel angry, don't you think? We don't put on quiet calming music, we want loud, booming music that mimics our emotional state, and perhaps even intensifies it.

Perhaps you've never thought about it, but take a moment now to consider it. The speed of the music

connects to our heartbeat, and the harmony connects with our emotional centres in the brain. That music can do this is no accident.

If we look back to the time when our distant ancestors were around, they used drums made of hollowed logs, tuned to a specific pitch via a stretched animal skin, and were beaten with the hands in a certain rhythm and tempo during rituals, in which the “music” got faster and faster to get the participants into a heightened emotional state. We can see the same thing happening in nightclubs today. The music has a fast tempo and repetitive qualities, that enable the dancers to “lose themselves” in the music (even without drugs), because the music acts like a drug on the brain.

It is as if our bodies and minds have become one with the vibration of the music. We lose inhibitions, we lose the “me,” and we start to wave our hands, gyrate our hips, and move our feet faster and faster just like the ancient tribal rituals. With each beat, the pulsing, repetitive music and lights put us deeper and deeper into what could almost be described as a trance (*a state of mind in which consciousness is fragile and voluntary action is poor or missing; a state resembling deep sleep*), in which we lose our control over our bodies, and just allow them to be carried by the music.

People take ecstasy (*a stimulant drug that is chemically related to mescaline and amphetamine and is used illicitly for its euphoric and hallucinogenic effects*) to heighten the effects, but as anyone who dances will tell you, you don't need it to feel euphoric. It's the music that takes you on a hypnotic journey into a state of being that has lost all sense of “I,” and you become one with the music.

Have I lost you, or are you still with me?

People have often been heard talking about “the universal vibration,” and although it was generally doped up hippies talking about it, there could be some truth in this. What do you think? We have already seen that music has the ability to affect our emotions quickly; that it affects our heartbeat and the speed our brain vibrates at, but could music be the key to understanding something important in the universe?

There was a famous film in the eighties, where the scientists played a series of tones to communicate with a spaceship that landed on earth, and although this was science fiction for entertainment purposes only, if we look into this deeply together, we can see that everything in the world is vibrating – even you and me – at such a fast speed that we appear to be solid. But we aren't.

We are a mass of vibrating atoms, bonded together, but not by glue. So if our atoms weren't bonded together, would we just float into space? Or more seriously, would we become part of the universe? Actually, by saying, “become part of the universe,” I am implying that we are not already a part of it, which we are. We just think we are separate.

It is only by accepting we are made up of molecules, which in themselves are not solid, that we will start to understand our place, not in the universe, but right here on earth, and realise that nothing is more important than that which already is.

If we could unbind our molecules what would happen to us? Would we die, or is there something, which those of us who have been grasping on to “life” as we know it “down here,” are missing? Is there really a universal vibration? Who knows. I just know that things are not as they seem, and that the only way we can find out the truth of it is to examine it carefully with our open minds without judgement.

Music is much, much more than just the next rock star strutting their stuff on stage. The right tones at the right tempo speak to us in a language way clearer than our own man-made language. How else can you explain the ability of a song – which is after all, just vibrations – to make us suddenly cry, feel excited, or happy? Music is a language we understand. We do not have to study for years to understand it. We do not have to take any exams to understand the connection we have to it and the connection it has to us.

Life is not solid. We are not solid. Music is not solid. Pure vibrations. Think about it.

N

Nationalism

1. *Love of country and willingness to sacrifice for it*
2. *The doctrine that your national culture and interests are superior to any other*
3. *The doctrine that nations should act independently (rather than collectively) to attain their goals*

In the opening dialogue, I asked you to visualise a simple scenario; one where you imagined for a moment, that you were a traveller from another planet, far, far away, and you have travelled for many years in search of intelligent life on other planets. You live in a land some may call utopia, where people are happy in themselves, tolerant of others and have plenty of food to eat. They don't need stimulants to distract them, know no violence, care for the planet, and don't need religion because they are not afraid.

They don't kill animals, live in self-sustaining communities, harness power from the sea, the sun and the wind, and share resources. They don't need retail therapy, and are not blinded by desire or greed. This is a land where governments don't exist, there are no guns, no armies, no generals. The oceans and rivers are clean. A planet where life is just about perfect... I would like you to imagine this again right now.

As you silently pass through the galaxies and star systems, a world appears in the distance; small but getting larger by the second, as you approach it. Closer. You see colours of blue, green and brown. Then you distinguish great oceans, mountains and land. Closer. You pass through the atmosphere, you see farm land, lakes and rivers, and closer still you begin to make out small dots... Could it be? Yes! Your computer system confirms that there is life on this planet!

As you come into land, you can make out buildings, transportation networks, and finally...people; just like you. You excitedly radio back to your base many millions of light years away that you have found what looks to be intelligent life. You are so excited, you beam the biggest smile. After so many years of searching, you have finally found what you set out to achieve – to find intelligent life on another planet.

As you do not wish to cause alarm to the people of this world, you land in an isolated place and make your way on foot to the city. This will be the expedition of a lifetime, to study another planet and its people, and eventually make contact with another human being.

On your expedition, what would you find here on earth? Do not answer straight away. I would like you to consider this very, very carefully. This is a topic of the utmost seriousness. I wonder if you would find something similar to me when I did this visualization. Now I am not pessimistic or optimistic in my approach to the world, I just try to see it how it really is, and I would ask you to do the same.

My expedition to planet earth : A visitors report

I arrive hoping to find a world like my own. It looks similar. It has breathable oxygen, water, sun, and green land to grow vegetables. The climate is bearable in most areas, and life seems to have permeated across the globe. On arrival, I begin to notice that things aren't quite the same as at home.

In the first place I visit, I see people starving, begging, full of disease; children with no family, no running water.

In the second, I cannot breathe properly. The toxic fumes from their transportation vehicles are killing me. I see people deliberately inhaling toxins from some kind of device. I feel claustrophobic; there are so many people in such a small space. The buildings rise tall above me, the noise is deafening; loud artificial sounds. I see a man beat another man to take something from him, I see people, so very angry at each other.

In the third, I see men killing each other for no apparent reason, although I did notice they were dressed slightly differently. I see men raping women and killing children, and other men living in luxurious palaces made from gold.

In the fourth, I see the forests being destroyed.

In the fifth, I see people kneeling before an image, with a man killing another man before a large audience of people who are clapping as if pleased with the event.

In the sixth, I see groups, with people whose faces I cannot see, bearing weapons, I see a huge wall dividing land, I see a woman blow herself up killing others, I see anger and hatred. I see men fighting to be the most powerful.

In the seventh, I see a man being tortured, by a man cutting off his fingers one by one. I see paper being exchanged for something whose purpose is death. I see men happily working on a project that can kill millions. I see division of people.

In the eighth, I see men drinking a strange liquid which makes them unsteady and fight with each other. I

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

see a young boy kill an old man. I see such hatred such anger.

In the ninth, I see desperate women raped by groups of men, others killed for speaking in public, and people forced to work all week for no pay. I see people chained up and beaten.

In the tenth, I see women having sex with many men in exchange for some paper and something they inject in their arm. I see cars patrolling the streets. I see fear. I see people hurriedly locking their doors. I see smoke from big factories. I see animals being murdered.

I see no happy faces. But why? The world I see here is abundant and full of beauty. I cannot comprehend the peoples who inhabit this world.

I unhappily return to my spacecraft, and report that, alas, I have failed in my mission to find intelligent life on this planet, and leave.

End of visitors report

I would like each of you to do your own visitors report. Even if it is something you just visualise. You may think that this is unimportant, but it will help you define your world view as it is at the moment. Next I would like you to think about the place you live in, the place you call a country (*the territory occupied by a nation*). You may not identify with any of what I “saw” as existing in your country. You may think I have only seen the bad in every place I visited, that in fact there are many good things that exist in the world today.

I do not want to get into an argument with you about this, all I ask is that you look around you and tell me what is great about your country. I'm sure you have a thousand answers. High Employment, large disposable income, democracy, free education, and health care for all. How about home-ownership, plenty to eat, negligible violence, and a stable government free from corruption with a police force to protect you? What we are inquiring on here is nationalism. Not the dictionary definition, but what it really means to be nationalistic.

Tell me if you have ever heard the term worldism? I know I haven't. It's not an “ism” we have in our language, like atheism, vegetarianism, fascism or racism. The definition of an ism is “*denotes a state or condition, belief or principle,*” so tell me, is the world in which we live not worthy of an ism? If the definition of an ism is something we believe in, then it may become clearer why there is no such word as worldism.

**

What do we actually *feel* when we feel nationalistic? For me, it's a sense of pride in people who have the same place of residence on their passport (*document issued by a country to a citizen allowing that person to travel abroad and re-enter the home country*). It is a feeling of superiority over someone else, not an individual but over billions of people who have a different passport, or who speak a different language. It's a feeling of belonging to a bigger group.

When you feel miserable, your relationship has failed, and you owe a lot of money etc. there is always the nation to feel good about. Your country. A place whose borders were carved out of war, many centuries ago, and are protected by the army.

Although some borders are invisible, there are many countries who build a physical barrier between themselves and their neighbours, thereby creating division between people who are genetically identical (in that they belong to the family homo sapiens, distinguished slightly by language and subtle defining features).

Yet, when physical barriers are put up, people begin to feel different, thanks to the powerful influence of culture, media, tradition, politics and teachers. You are no longer plain old homo sapiens. You are now british, chinese, american, german, iranian, argentinian, australian, swedish, thai, and proud of it! You feel pride (*a feeling of self-respect and personal worth, Satisfaction with your (or another's) achievements*). You now say: “I am proud to be british.” “I am proud to be chinese.” “I am proud to be iranian.”

Listen to those statements, what do they mean to you? Well, in relation to nationalism, self-respect and self-worth cannot be applied, as it has nothing to do with your individual achievements. This is the group we are talking about here, the “we”, the group whose one thing in common is the passport they hold. Even if you are of chinese, saudi, indian, jamaican, thai, or somalian birth, once you hold a passport that says “usa” or “japan,” you become part of the group, and that group is your extended family. You are now brothers, bonded

by the great nation, the nation that will look after you when you are sick, fight for your beliefs during war, help you find a job, and look after you when you retire.

Let's face it, nationalism makes you feel good about yourself in a way that worldism never could. Why? Because, unlike worldism, which by its definition would have to be inclusive, nationalism separates us into individual competing groups each trying to beat the other. War is a great example of this. When politicians and generals decide that another country is doing something *they* don't like or *they* want to invade or occupy, *they* declare war. Through government propaganda, they stoke the fires of nationalism and rally support for "our boys, out there fighting for YOU!" In war, nationalism has nothing to do with being morally right or wrong.

In the second world war, the germans had the same nationalistic feelings about their country, as the allies did about theirs. It is a feeling so strong, that if anyone mentions anything bad about your country you're willing to fight them, in war time, or peace.

Nationalism

1. Love of country and willingness to sacrifice for it

Imagine that! You who know nothing about the people of the other country (except what your leaders have told you), and are prepared to give your life (and take many others) in the name of *your* country.

If you actually met a german, british, american, spanish or japanese man, I'm sure you would find most of them very nice, not at all like the demonised image your country leaders gave you of them during war.

You see, stirring up nationalism is good for governments when they need to do something, and they want to enlist your support to help them do it. After all, the second world war would have been no more than a bar room brawl if it was just hitler and his cabinet vs. churchill and his cabinet. Imagine that, they would have sorted out their differences, or even killed one another, and then everybody could have got back to business as usual. Instead, they stirred up the nation, turned individuals into a mob and motivated everyone to go to war.

How can you turn against a whole nation of people? Especially as we were all good friends prior to the war? How can you suddenly hate all british, all germans, all americans, all japanese, and all french? Well, as was proved in the various wars, the key ingredient was nationalism. By instilling a feeling of such superiority over every other nation, and the feeling we are good and they are bad, political and military leaders have – throughout time – been able to appeal to people to forget their individualism and come together as one. One Group. One Nation.

This appeals to us, as it instils a sense of pride in us. We sense we are doing something for the greater good, that the nation is all important, and we dutifully sign up, ready to be cut down by the first bullet, or blown to pieces by a bomb.

By using propaganda that makes us feel as if we owe the nation (after all they've done for us), governments can rely on the fact that they will have plenty of willing volunteers to do their bidding; safe in the knowledge that no one will take the time to consider whether it is ethically right or wrong. After all, what's good for the nation is good for me!

In peace time this is expressed through sport, namely teams or teams of individuals that compete head to head; to be the best in the world. (e.g. the football world cup or the olympics). This replaces war as the method to achieve superiority over other countries. It may not cause bloodshed on the field of battle, but it can in the stands, where people are prepared to fight one another, just because one is wearing a green shirt and the other is wearing a white one!

Have you ever heard football supporters screams, cheers, yells, and the abuse they give the other team? They are like a pack of wolves out for the kill, they have lost their individuality and are now collectively one nation. Proud to be superior.

I love my country

Do you love your country? I've asked you before, but what makes you different to everybody else, what

really defines you as a nation? What makes you great? Sorry, just before that little voice strikes up, with the voice of years of conditioning, let's imagine another scenario. Imagine the science fiction films were right and we were about to engage in a world between worlds – that armies from across the galaxy were intent on destroying us. Where would your nationalism be then? What use would it be? What would it matter what colour you were, what religion you were, how you dressed, what language you spoke?

The invaders wouldn't care about that. To them, you're all the same, human. They are intent on killing every last one of you, just because they don't like your way of life, they think you're all evil, are a threat to their way of life and actually... just because *they* want to own the earth now! Makes you think, doesn't it?

So, before you spread division throughout the world with nationalism; before you make children hate other children because they come from a different country; before you dislike whole nations because they look different, or they support a different team, or they belong to the wrong religion... *Stop*, for a quiet moment, and ask yourself: "What is our ultimate goal as humans? Is it not the continuing existence of life on earth?" You tell me.

Worldism – a term never destined for the dictionary whilst nationalism is still there

[Back to Index](#)

Nature

1. *The natural physical world including plants and animals and landscapes etc.*

Have you ever been for a walk along a rugged coastline, or a walk through woodland forests or mountains? With no music players to distract you, or people constantly talking? If you have, you may know what I mean when I describe the feeling as “being in one's natural state.” If you haven't, let me delve a little deeper.

If I could explain it, I would say I felt connected to the earth whilst out in nature. Lots of you actually know this feeling when you go on holiday somewhere beautiful (I'm not talking about the latest five star beach resort!), I mean that there's something about the place in its natural state, which makes you feel as though you are in a different world. And in fact you are!

A place where there are no buildings, no cars, no artificial noise; just natural sounds, like the wind in the trees, a trickling stream, or the rush of the ocean. And you don't need to go to the corners of the earth to find this; most of us have places in our own countries where we can experience it. Even a stone wall seems to fit in. But let's explore this together.

Why do we feel calm here? Why do we say: “Wow! This place is amazing?” Because we know, that deep down, this is us. We are nature and nature is us. But most of us live in areas full of artificial noise and concrete – both unnatural. If you are ever in the countryside and you hear a chainsaw, or you are standing by the ocean, and you hear a jet ski, you will know what I mean. The mechanical sounds grate on our nerve endings, and we feel tense, as the sounds do not fit in with the surroundings. The same way as a concrete wall in a mountain range not only looks out of place but also feels out of place.

But how relaxed do we feel when we sit by the ocean, just listening to the sound of the waves crashing on the shore? It is intense, magnificent. A place where we feel calm, where we feel free to daydream, where hours can pass without needing to rush home and watch tv, or go to the pub for a beer. A place where all our troubles melt away with every wave.

Yet we surround ourselves with artificial noise all the time. Television. Walking with an mp3 music player. Playing computer games. Going to pubs and clubs where the music is so deafening, we cannot hear ourselves think. And that is the key – that we cannot hear ourselves think. You see, most of us don't want to spend time with ourselves, without noise, that's why people put the tv or music on when they are alone, “just to keep them company.”

We live in such a noisy world now that we feel anxious and nervous when there is silence. We do not want to be alone with our thoughts any longer than is necessary. We need to keep busy, to always be doing something, to always have noise in our brain. Because we don't really want to hear what's going on in our head, do we? That would be much too frightening. So we use excuses like “I'm watching an interesting program,” or “I love music.”

How many people could say they have ever come home from a hard day at work and sat there in silence? It wouldn't be very comfortable, would it? But nature is different, because nature is never silent.

How many of you love to hear the fierce wind in the trees whilst in bed at night, or love to hear the rain against your windows whilst watching and listening to the faint crackle of the wood fire? I'm sure most people do.

The ancients believed that the universe was made up of four elements, wind, fire, water, and earth, so don't you find it interesting that these elements are also what relax us the most? Music created for relaxation in the home uses the same principles.

*The sound of the wind
Watching and hearing a fire crackle
Watching and listening to the sound of a stream or the ocean
Walking on the earth*

As humans, the most intelligent advanced beings on the planet, we view nature as something to be looked at, not something we are part of, and it is in this fundamental mistake that we have lost our connection to the earth. We create artificial environments to live in, sometimes hundreds of feet in the sky, we live in communities where no one knows anyone, and we don't work in harmony with nature, we try to control it.

We also treat it as an inexhaustible supplier of goods. You see, since the beginning, nature has always been a supplier who happily balances the books every year, with each customer taking and receiving what he needs for survival.

Nature didn't count on us ordering more than we were prepared to give back, and come to think of it, since the industrial revolution, we have just been takers.

In our never ending race to make our lives ridiculously comfortable, seeking anything to make us happier, we have been on a non-stop mission to effectively alter the balance once and for all; by raiding nature of all its resources, something that a lion or tiger hasn't done in a million years.

We dig, and we dig, looking for coal to fuel our power stations; we raid the oil in the earth to fuel our cars and make plastics; we mine for precious gems to become wealthy and powerful; we make chemicals to spray on our vegetables to make them grow bigger; we pour millions of tons of waste into the seas. We dig and we keep digging. We alter the landscape permanently to create new homes, and we can't stop. We just can't stop. Where will this end?

Well, one day, the earth will have no more resources, and we'll have to move. But let's face it, you and I won't be around then, so it's no good thinking about. But what I want to understand is why we continue to damage the planet we are on, when there is no obvious replacement earth within the nearest x million light years, and indeed, even if there were, how would we get there?

We are as much a part of nature as the seed that grows into a tree, the egg which becomes a bird, or the bee that pollinates the flower. We've just forgotten how.

In our super fast evolution to become homo sapiens (which you remember is characterized by superior intelligence, articulate speech, and erect carriage), we somehow developed the idea that we were better than nature, as opposed to part of it. Whilst we continually find ways to control and contain nature, it is happily existing, forever changing, never complaining, just getting on with it.

Looking back over the years, the natural world has done a pretty good job of looking after the planet; constantly balancing the books, with floods, droughts, extinction, renewal, rebirth. The problem is, this looking after the planet business is pretty complex stuff; something our brains do not really have the capacity to understand as yet, and maybe never will.

Think back to when you take a walk in the woods, the large animals, the fungi, the micro-organisms, the trees and the plants, all here to perform a specific task in the business of keeping the world in balance. Do you ever think about the purpose of seemingly useless (or even annoying) living things on the earth?

In the summer, we all wonder about wasps, whose only purpose in our minds, is to ruin our barbecues and sting us. In the warmer countries, we wonder about mosquitoes, who only come out at night while we are sleeping to bite us! Or how about the common house fly or spider we chase round the house, trying to kill with a rolled up piece of newspaper?

Let's face it, we just don't understand nature, and to be honest we don't want to. We want to keep it at bay; to look at it through the glass window of an aquarium or the bars of a bird cage. We don't know how to interact with nature, we're scared of it, because unlike the animals in the woodland or the big lions in africa, we don't quite know our purpose; how we fit in.

We don't know our role, except we are told we are the supreme predator – due to our supreme intelligence and tool making ability. We only know we are in a position of power, that we are better than the fish, the animals and the trees, and rightly so! After all, who has heard a tree discuss philosophy, an ant build a suspension bridge, or a parrot build a skyscraper? Anyone who suggested such a thing could be possible would be dismissed as crazy!

We are the most intelligent beings on the planet. We have a consciousness. We are aware of ourselves. We have the power of complex language. We have the capacity to learn new things every day. We have the power to create beautiful things; but we also have the power to destroy. Imagine coming head to head with a lion, tiger, or even a bull, and try to kill it with your bare hands! Wouldn't be much of a contest would it? I think we all know who would be voted the ultimate predator. But the thing is, even these animals who could tear us to pieces, with their teeth, or their horns, haven't really got the slightest bit of interest in us, unless we threaten them. They aren't interested in eating us. Why? Because we're not on their menu.

Every animal eats specific things in order to do what's best for their system, and assist nature retain balance, even if they are not consciously aware of that fact. Look at some of the biggest animals in the world, what do they eat? Grass! Look at whales, what do they eat? Microscopic plankton! Everything on this earth is doing something for a reason, and that reason is to keep the world in balance. A bull might not be aware of why he is eating grass, but even if he were, he would keep eating it, as his system is finally tuned to process the nutrients out of it, something we could never eat, as our system could not digest it.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

All in all, we're a bit lost really. Having lost our place in the natural world as a contributor, we have started using our complex minds for different ends, namely, for enjoyment and acquiring wealth. We have become greedy. We want everything, and we will do anything to get it. We won't let anyone get in our way. This is not about need; humans could live happily, if they had a garden full of vegetables, fresh running water, and a nice warm place to sleep.

This is about organising ourselves in such a way so that we can acquire wealth. That is the main goal of humans now, not living as part of the natural world as a contributor. We live in places where it is impossible to grow your own vegetables, where the most important thing is to be close to where you work, the place where you earn money. And of course, close to where you can spend your money.

Food production is no longer in your hands, as you are too busy earning money to worry about that. Huge companies have been created to grow food for you, raise and kill animals for you, and pre-make your food so you only have to heat it. You can even have food that is grown in different countries brought to you by the miracle of modern transportation.

Who are you now, ultimate predator?

As you walk along the supermarket aisles with your fine clothes on, selecting choicest meats, and succulent tropical fruits, perusing dairy products packaged for you, oh, so nicely.

Delicately smelling and selecting.

The only requirement is money.

“Progress!” I hear you shouting. “This is progress! We don't live in mud huts anymore, hunting and gathering, growing vegetables, storing rain water. This is the modern world! We must progress! We cannot go backwards!” But in some countries people do live like this! Some people live simply, growing their own food or raising their own livestock to provide their family with food. They may not have “progressed,” as we know it. But there is one thing I'd like to ask you: Who do you think is more connected with nature? Us, the modern city dweller, who buys his food in nice packages that have been shipped across the globe, or the man who plants a seed and waters it, nurtures it watching it grow, tending it throughout the season, and when finally it is ready, harvests it and eats it?

In our modern life, we still need food, water, and shelter, we just pay someone else to provide it for us. You see, the acquisition of money has changed the way we connect with nature. We are no longer at one with the world. We are outside, looking in. We now fear nature. We fear coming into close contact with wild animals and fish. We feel scared if we are in a wood alone. We fear for our very existence. We think that the wildlife want to harm us, when in fact most of them are more scared of us than we are of them. We need to control nature, to tame it, to domesticate it, so we feel comfortable living in the world. Surely this is not what progress is about?

As we don't understand the delicate balance that has been achieved over millions of years, we never realise that changing nature (like the damming of rivers and the felling of ancient forests), can cause environmental catastrophes. For us, nature is a means to an end. A means to live comfortably, to acquire money and enable us to live in isolation, surrounded only by other humans, where we feel safe in the knowledge that no wild animal will be able to get into our city, our house or apartment! But think on this. More humans are harmed every year by other humans than ever by wild animals, but still we are afraid.

Connection to the earth can only come through letting nature back into our lives. This is perhaps the reason that when we are walking by the ocean watching the sunset or looking out over mountain ranges that the place feels special to us. A place where we have not tried to change nature, a place where we exist in harmony with the earth. Just being, not trying to control, not trying to overcome. Just listening and understanding.

In this place we are not bored, we do not complain, we marvel at the beauty of the world and we do not want to leave. At the end of our short lives, we return to the earth. It's the living we have to work on. The time when – instead of defeating nature – we become its partner.

Connect!

Do you feel part of nature now? Probably not. You see, as humans, we've spent a long time trying to get out of nature, so there's no reason you should feel different after reading four or five pages! But if you feel like something's missing, if your life feels somewhat empty, starting to reconnect with nature is a good start. It doesn't mean you have to dress differently, hug a tree, or go and live in a wood. Just start to look around you more, start to be more aware of yourself and how you interact with your surroundings.

When you are shopping in your supermarket, remember the animal who gave his life for your fillet steak in the nice plastic wrapper, or the tomato plant that grew from a small seed to become a filler for your sandwich. Look at your urban landscape, think of the material your homes and your offices are made from. See your cars polluting your air with noise, the smoke coming from industry. Listen to the sounds of the city. Try to watch yourselves, as you sit bored, watching tv or dvd's. Think about the cattle who provide the milk, when you complain about the price of cheese. Remember the forest that took longer to grow than you have lived when you toss away the piece of paper.

Now think back to a time when you experienced nature in its entirety. Visualise the mountains with their snowy peaks, the stream running through the hills, the ocean waves pounding the shore. The peaceful walk through the forest covered with leaves and birds in song. Visualise the first time you saw a creature in its natural habitat. The rabbit bounding across the field, not in its cage, the birds flying freely high in the sky, not behind bars.

Now think of your city, think of the fun, the bars, the nightclubs, getting drunk, spending your money. The cinema, going bowling, spending a night at the arts.

Now remember the peace, the calmness and the stillness. Remember the wild beauty of nature.

Now back to your wide screen plasma tv, your surround sound, your king size bed, your car, your job. Your problems, your lack of money, the boredom of it all.

Now camping in nature, looking at the stars, the quiet knowledge you exist in a place surrounded by billions of other worlds, and yet have no idea where you are. The hoot of the owl, the night creatures stirring, all ready to contribute to keeping nature in balance.

Let me ask you, which one of the above is your *natural* state? I know where mine is.

With the pace of modern life, we only “go into nature” as a treat, a holiday, or a break from earning money. It is seen as something we have earned the right to do – to go camping for two weeks in the hills. Yes, it relaxes us. We are in awe of the beautiful scenery, but at the end of the two weeks we sadly pack up our tent and return to the city where for the first week we hate being back in. Give it a week and you're back in your modern life, with all thoughts of nature placed firmly on hold until next years holiday.

“So apart from giving up my urban life and moving to the country, where I live self-sufficiently with my ten chickens, one cow, and a vegetable plot, what can I realistically do to reconnect with nature?”

Well, you all come up with your own ideas, but here is one I would like you think about. Grow something. I don't mean buying a plant from a garden centre and watering it every day. I'm talking about something you can ultimately eat. I am talking about taking a seed and nurturing it, watching it grow, feeding it with water and sunlight, until it is ready for harvest then enjoying it. It truly is a rewarding experience. This is something you don't need a huge garden for, you can grow it in an apartment, or on a balcony.

Take the seed and plant it (tomatoes for example), water it, and look after it. You are responsible for the life of the plant. If you leave it, it will die, but given love and care, it will grow into a plant and provide for you. When it is ready, harvest it gently, and take time to savour its taste. You have given life to the plant, and in return it will reward you with the nutrients your body needs to sustain life. Try it. You may be surprised how you feel.

[Back to Index](#)

Need

1. *Anything that is necessary but lacking*
2. *The psychological feature that arouses an organism to action toward a desired goal; the reason for the action; that which gives purpose and direction to behaviour*
3. *Require as useful, just, or proper*

Part 1 – Objects

What do you *need*? I mean *really need*? You may answer: A new car, to help you get to work every day, or a new washing machine to clean your clothes, as your old one is broken. You need a bigger house as your family is growing. You need a pay rise because you can't afford to pay your bills. You need a holiday because your work is too stressful. But would you say you actually needed all these items?

These are all modern day requirements (*anything indispensable*), but would you say you *needed* to have them? Maybe we should use the words “nice to have.” It would be nice to have a new car to help you get to work every day, or nice to have a new washing machine to clean your clothes as your old one is broken, or nice to have a bigger house as your family is growing. When we discuss need though, what are we talking about? Is it something that is necessary for the healthy functioning of the system like food and water, or are we talking about this “nice to have?”

Let's start by saying that in order to survive, we need food and water, but we also need clothing, shoes, shelter, and warmth. To avoid disease, we need a sanitary system to dispose of the waste products, and we need to have a job to earn money to pay for these things. You see, in the beginning, when we lived in caves, wore animal skins, hunted or gathered our meal every day, and went to the toilet outdoors – as animals continue to do today – our needs were limited. But as we, and as a result, society became more complex, we began to need things not necessary in cave dwelling times.

Urban communities

Modern post-industrial revolution society has been organised into high density living areas, close to places of work, where people with little in common, live very closely. Most of us do not know our adjacent neighbours at all, apart from brief hello's, and maybe invites for dinner, and certainly don't know anyone who lives more than 200 metres away or on another street, unless it is a friend we work with, went to school with, or play sport with. As a result, this has lead us into creating compartmentalised lives, relying on no one in the outside world – becoming insular in our approach to the rest of society.

It makes sense that we have had to acquire items which allow us to operate on our own without the need to rely on other people, or we employ companies to do work that needs doing, like plumbing or electrics. In fact, most of us feel embarrassed or unwilling to ask a neighbour for help with something, even if it means making our lives more difficult.

How many of us would ask a neighbour if we could use their washing machine or toilet, as ours is broken, or share a lift with them to work, as we don't have a car? Few if any, I'd guess, and even if they were asked, neighbours would grumble and complain about the inconvenience of it. “Do you know they had the cheek to ask me to take their kids to school the other day,” even if your children go to the same school.

As communities have broken down, and been replaced with independent people who just happen to live next door to each other, the need has increased to be self-reliant. So when you, or I, who live in an urbanised setting says he needs a car to get to work, there is a genuine requirement for this, as you need to get to work to pay your bills!

Rural communities

Let's look at the rural community for a moment, and take a small village as our example. There are, say, 150 people living there, all with different skills; a small school, or village hall and a local pub.

How many of you have tried to move to the “country” and found they didn't fit in? This happens quite often, as people with money decide they want more space and a bigger house, and to live in a nice environment. The only problem being, that you bring your independent, self-reliant attitude with you, where you don't need help, and you don't think anyone should ask you! But you see, rural communities aren't organised like that.

How many of your neighbours in the city would drop round with some eggs, or apples because they had

too many? How many would help out because your car had broken down, or ask around to see if anyone had any work because you had just been made redundant? People in rural communities share more, even if it is only time they are giving you.

They meet regularly to discuss the village, they will provide assistance willingly. The whole village becomes like an extended family. They are different because they want to be involved with each other, they are contributing to the well being of the village in addition to making money for themselves. I am not suggesting rural communities have the best way of life, I am illustrating the differences between rural and urban communities.

Who knows, perhaps things have changed in rural communities and they have become like their urban cousins?

But let's get back to discussing *need vs. nice to have*.

I think all of us would agree, that if it came to it, we could live in mud huts, wash our clothes in the same water we bath in, go to the toilet in the ground, and gather food every day, but that is merely surviving, not living, isn't it? And as we have come so far, it seems a pity to have to go back hundreds of years. Let's say that the basic needs for "living" in today's world as opposed to just "surviving" are the following:

1. A house or flat with hot and cold running water, electricity for lighting, and cooking, a kitchen area to prepare food cooking utensils, a room for sleeping and a room for living and a flushable toilet.
2. Several items of clothing and shoes.
3. Basic toiletries, like toothpaste and soap.
4. Some form of heating if you live in a cold country.
5. A job that pays for the above.
6. Access to health care.
7. Access to education.
8. A telephone for communication.
9. Access to basic foodstuffs for sale.
10. Access to a washing machine to clean clothes and linen.
11. Access to public transportation.

What do you think, is that a fair list? I'm sure a lot of you would like to add tv to that list, but I think that's a "nice to have" don't you? Everything else must be a "nice to have," from holidays, to pay rises, although anyone in a low paid or stressful job may disagree. What one person needs, another just wants to have.

For me, the concern is that we are starting to confuse desire (*an inclination to want things*) with need (*anything that is necessary but lacking*). If you replace the word desire, when you say: "I want a new tv," to "I desire a new tv," "I desire more money," "I desire a bigger house," it suddenly feels sordid, as if you are doing something bad, and "immoral", but I think we have come to a point in our acquisitiveness that to replace need with desire would be much more grammatically correct.

People in africa need fresh clean running water

I need a new tv

People who have lost their homes in floods need somewhere to sleep

I need a new dishwasher

Children who are starving need food

I need a new dvd player

-

I need somewhere to sleep

I need a new king size bed for my bedroom

I need new tools to farm my land

I need some new power tools

becomes

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

*People in africa need fresh clean running water
I desire a new tv
People who have lost their homes in floods need somewhere to sleep
I desire a new dishwasher
Children who are starving need food
I desire a new dvd player*

-

*I need somewhere to sleep
I desire a new king size bed for my bedroom
I need new tools to farm my land
I desire some new power tools*

This does not mean that desiring a new tv is a good or bad thing. I just believe that it is important to differentiate need and desire. It is important to show them as two opposing states, and maybe when we start to transpose desire over need, we will begin to think about what it really is we need in life – what the ultimate *need* that will make us happy is. Although we all feel happy when we get a new tv. Right?

Part 2 – Emotional needs

We have discussed need as a physical expression. We have explored whether the need is necessary for human survival, or if it is just nice to have – which we have labelled desire. But there is another human need; one very basic, and one you can't buy, no matter how much money you have. It is the need to feel love. To love another human being and to feel loved yourself.

We talk about people having emotional needs. A need to satisfy something you can't find physically in the body. A need that one cannot see, or show to another; a need for something invisible but very real to the person experiencing it.

I need you, I really need you. How many of us have used that expression? Who do we use it to? Certainly not a co-worker, friend, or family member. We use this to someone we care deeply about, someone we love, whom we share a special relationship with. Someone who makes us feel happy whenever they're around. So need, in this case, is perhaps an expression of love. Not need, as in possession, but need in the sense of I want to be close to you and show you how much I love you.

I think we can all agree we “need” to feel something. A need to not only feel but express our emotions, ranging from fear, to hate; from anger, to love; from joy to sadness.

Expressing complex emotions makes us human. It shows the world we are not just a machine but emotions can be all encompassing, engulfing. We can be overwhelmed by them, unable to cope, unable to deal with life; or filled with energy, with love, and with joy.

*Have you seen the face of a man at a birth
filled with joy, light beaming from his eyes
How he loves the child, he would do anything for her
His life is complete, he feels at peace*

*Have you ever seen the face of a man who has lost a child
tortured with sadness, inconsolable with grief
How he loved that child he would have given his own life
Just for one more minute with him*

When we are talking about the need to feel. Some people would say that feeling any emotions is better than feeling none at all, but I would say we only need to feel love. I don't wake up in the morning and think: “I need to feel anger,” or “I need to feel jealousy!” I may wake up in the morning and think I feel jealous, or I feel angry, but I don't actively need to feel these emotions. Why? Because they are negative. I only need to feel positive emotions, that's why I need to feel love. I need to feel loved.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

As a child, how would you *feel* if you could not *feel* love from your parents? How many children around the world have this need denied to them by coming from broken or violent homes?

When a child's emotional needs are fulfilled, he grows up complete, ready to express the same love to his children. But when they are not, he still needs to feel love from someone, but is unable to give it in return.

I need love, nothing else.
When I love and am loved
I am complete.

[Back to Index](#)

O

Order

1. *Established customary state (especially of society)*
2. *(often plural) a command given by a superior (e.g., a military or law enforcement officer)
that must be obeyed*
3. *A condition of regular or proper arrangement*

We all like order in our lives, don't we? We wake up at 5.45 am. We shower until 6.00 am. We take our clothes from the closet, and we have breakfast until 7.30 am. We drive to the station on the left hand side of the road, get on the train, and arrive at work at 8.30 am. We drink our coffee until 8.45 am and we start work at 9.00 am. We work in an ordered manner until lunchtime which is 1.00 pm. We take out our sandwich from our lunch box which has been neatly wrapped in cling film. We then read the daily paper until 1.30 pm at which time we put away our lunch box and paper and return to our ordered work. We have a tea break at 3.15 pm and we finish our work at 5.30 pm. We get on the 5.45 pm train and arrive home at 6.30 pm. We put away our work clothes, and prepare dinner, which we eat at 7.30 pm. We then wash the dishes, and watch television until 10.30 pm. We then go to bed and sleep. Repeat.

We all like to moan about it, but it's what keeps us going. We need this order in our daily lives to keep our minds calm. This is also what some people might call a routine, or a rhythm. When we break this routine, we feel nervous and jumpy. "It's not as it's supposed to be" you think, as you get up late for work at 7.30 am. You grab breakfast and miss your train, which makes you late for work. It's not a pleasant feeling, is it? But it's not the end of the world!

You see, most of us allow a certain amount of flexibility in our routine, so if we're late occasionally, or things don't go to plan, it's no great problem, as long as the underlying order is there. We need a structure to help us get up in the morning, that's why people who are unemployed, or retired, find it very difficult. There is no longer the structure that work provided as a reason to get up in the morning. So either their minds, and therefore their lives become disordered, or they invent a new routine.

For example, an unemployed man may set himself a task of looking at the newspapers for jobs from 8.15 am until 10.15 am then perhaps go for a walk until 11.30 am. He will have lunch at 1.00 pm and then spend two hours in the library from 2.00 pm until 4.00 pm. The retired man may still set his alarm early, get up and make breakfast at a specified time, then have a plan to go for a walk followed by a cup of tea. That might be the only part of his day he plans, but at least one part of the day must be the same – every day.

Our minds do not like sudden change too much, it upsets their natural rhythm – so day in, day out, we order our lives accordingly.

Can you imagine how much discomfort you would feel, if breakfast was at a different time every day, or work started at 9.00 am on a monday, 10.25 am on a tuesday, 9.30 am on a wednesday, or you changed jobs every week? It would send your mind into turmoil.

Oh your home is so tidy!

We also like order in the home. It's where we spend at least part of our day, and more importantly, it's where we relax. So most of us like the home tidy, as it helps us relax more (tidy equals ordered). Let me tell you a story.

When I first moved in with my wife several years ago, I saw nothing of the disorder that was to arrive later. We owned nothing except our backpacks, so it was fairly easy to be tidy. Over the next few months, we started buying things for the house, kitchen equipment, bedroom furniture, etc.

The first thing I noticed about my wife, was that even if she was the last person out of bed, she wouldn't make it, even if it meant just throwing the duvet up, and she would throw her pyjamas on the floor. At first I thought it was me being a bit obsessive, and I made the bed myself. No big deal.

Then as we spent longer in the house, I noticed that whenever she made herself something to eat she would just leave the plate on the floor and wouldn't ever pick it up! The kitchen became so filled with plates and pots that you couldn't move in it. Once again I thought, "this is my job to clean up, as I am not working at the moment," and tidied it until it was spotless. She would then come home, make something to eat and leave all the dirty plates, knives, chopping board, etc. out on the bench, and just walk off and watch tv. That's when I thought she must be just lazy. So I told her as such, and she pointed out that she was the one who was working... So I shut up.

She then started buying clothes and leaving a trail of them from the bedroom to the lounge. They were everywhere. I couldn't move in the bedroom for clothes, it was driving me mad. So I would tidy up as often as I could.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

She said that there were more important things in life than cleaning and she didn't want to spend her days cleaning like her "cleaning obsessed mother." I figured maybe this was all some mother, daughter thing; mother obsessed with cleaning, daughter rebelling against it. This feeling was reaffirmed when I saw her sister's room which was exactly the same. "Ah ha!" I thought. "I've got it!" But I just couldn't stand that my wife couldn't see that (a) it was better to be tidy and (b) it was driving me insane. Her mother couldn't understand it either: "She's always been like it. I was always picking up after her."

So I just became more and more angry about it, and eventually split up. I just couldn't see how she could live like that. She didn't care if the house was falling around her, or there were cockroaches on all the work surfaces (there were), so I just figured she was the laziest person I had ever met!

When I think of her now, she wasn't lazy. She got up at 5.30 am on the dot every day and did a full day's work. She was never sick, and always arrived on time. It was only when she came home that her life became disorganised. So why was this happening?

Like many people, she was content with the order that work gave her, but that's because it was all ordered for her. All she had to do was turn up on time. At home, her own mind was in charge of creating order. That was the problem! So why was her own mind disordered (if that is what was happening)? It is time we left my ex-wife alone, and zoomed out to look at our planet from afar!

365 days a year - 24 hours a day - 7 days a week

If we watched the planet spinning on its axis from a great distance, we would see that it rotates around the sun in perfect order. It does not have an off day. It does not decide that a day is longer than 24 hours, it just is. The whole galaxy is engaged in this same order. Of course, a star may explode from time to time, but the whole process goes on quietly in order with no thought, no design and no control. The universe, as we know it, is in order.

When we come back to earth and look at a tree, you will see that it is in proportion. The flowers and the animals too. Wherever we look in the world, order is quietly at work. Even when we look at ourselves in the mirror we can see that our legs, arms, head, and our torso are all perfectly symmetrical, and thanks to modern science we can see that just as the earth orbits the sun, as does the path of an electron around the nucleus of an atom.

We are in perfect order. From the largest objects down to the smallest we know about, we can see that, in nature, there is perfect order. There is no escaping it. Or is there?

Let's create some disorder

So if everything is in order, how can the world we inhabit be in such a mess? Why do we fight and kill each other? Why do we crave power? Why do we live in houses that are filled with junk, and litter our streets? We only have to look at a beautiful lake, with birds, and trees, and a mountain in the background, to see that nature is in perfect order. It just feels and looks perfect, doesn't it? Until you look down and see that some tourist has had their lunch there and thrown all the rubbish on the ground. Suddenly there is disorder. But if the human being is biologically in order, what could be causing us to create so much disorder?

Look at the cities, the cars, the pollution, the work we do, the governments, the wars, the way we treat animals and each other, the desires, the hate, the despair, the obsession with money, the rushing, the violence, the cutting down and clearing of forests. There is only one thing wrong here, and that is Man thinks too much! It can be the only reason we cause so much mischief in the world.

The ending of thought

Let's go into this slowly and carefully together shall we? If I am saying that the universe is in perfect order, that nature itself is order, and that biologically all the cells in man's body are perfectly ordered, yet I can see

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

the trouble in the world is Man's own doing, the only thing that cannot be in order is man's thinking. Does that make sense to you?

We don't have to look far from home to see that everything we touch, we disorder. Thought is the enemy of intelligence. The intelligent man would not disturb nature in the way we have, yet we call ourselves intelligent, and all the while desire more money and more status, only concerned with what "I" can get out of life.

Governments try to keep "order" by laying down rules and regulations about what we can and cannot do, and even enforce it by using police, courts and prisons, but it makes no real difference while we are still thinking. We kill, and we injure, we intimidate, we hate and we destroy. That is the result of our thinking, and it has nothing to do with our heritage as hunters.

This is all new. This is our big brain saying: "I want to do whatever I want to do, and no one is going to stop me." It doesn't know that it is causing so much misery, it just wants what it can get. Thought is the biggest sickness in the universe!

So how do we stop ourselves thinking?

Unfortunately, the more I try to stop myself thinking, the more I think, and so on. We cannot force our minds to do anything they do not want to do. It is only when I see that I am the cause of disorder in the universe, that change can really happen. Can you see that it is your thinking that is putting the world out of balance, which is order? I'm sure you can't. You see, you're too caught up in the "me" at the moment, and in an ordered universe, there is no "me," there is only order! Does that make any sense?

Is the moon thinking of "me" when it reflects the light onto the earth's surface that helps us see? Does the sun, think about "me" when it sends heat and light millions of miles to earth to sustain life, to give us warmth and to help the plants grow that feed us? No. In the same way as the stars do not think about "me" when they align and help people who are lost find their way home. They just are.

And if you are part of this order which is nature, then how can you escape it? The answer is, you can't. You are part of the universe and it is part of you. You only "think" you aren't; that you are separate, an individual. And it is this thinking of individuality that causes the "me" to come in, which is thought. My needs, my desires, my money, my job, my hopes and fears.

When you see that all is one, then what importance do your needs and desires have? You may "think" they are important, but that is just thought, which is disorder. When we develop true intelligence through awareness, the trouble we have caused will start to fall away and the world will return to order. If we don't, then the world will still return to order, it's just that we won't be around to see it. Now that would be a shame. It's our choice.

[Back to Index](#)

Orgasm

1. *The moment of most intense pleasure in sexual intercourse*

I know this may be an intimate question, but can I ask you what you think when you have an orgasm? This may sound strange, but it is a valid question. I can tell you what I think. Nothing, absolutely nothing. It's a feeling of total bliss in the moment, the time when I feel whole; at one with everything. I have no problems; I don't worry about bills, debts, or tax. I don't think about the world, the poor, the hungry, or the sick. For me, it's a moment where although excited, I am calm inside, without thought.

Is it strange to think that as a male, our whole life is leading up to this moment. Think about this carefully. Could your whole life really be about this moment? This may seem an absurd question, but please go into it with me.

How did we get here? Through a moment, just like the one we are talking about here, I would guess. If your father, or his father, or his father before him, failed to have an orgasm, you and I would not be here. There is no chance you would exist as you are today, with your genetic code, without generations of men in your family having an orgasm before you! Something so fast, so natural, that it has enabled generations of little you's and me's to exist.

Think on this for a moment. I will limit the number of generations in this example as we would have to go back to the beginning of time, that is the significance of an orgasm!

1. Your great, great, great grandfather has an orgasm which lasts approximately five to six seconds. Out of millions of sperm, *one* fertilizes an egg, and the process of life begins.
2. Your great, great grandfather is born, and when he grows up, has an orgasm, which lasts approximately five to six seconds. Out of millions of sperm, *one* fertilizes an egg and the process of life begins.
3. Your great grandfather is born, and when he grows up, has an orgasm which lasts approximately five to six seconds. Out of millions of sperm, *one* fertilizes an egg, and the process of life begins.
4. Your grandfather is born, and when he grows up, has an orgasm which lasts approximately five to six seconds. Out of millions of sperm, *one* fertilizes an egg, and the process of life begins.
5. Your father is born, and when he grows up, has an orgasm which lasts approximately five to six seconds. Out of millions of sperm *one* fertilizes an egg, and the process of life begins.
6. You are born!

So as you can see, the orgasm plays an important part in your personal history. It is in fact crucial to the continuity of life on this planet. So it's no wonder that when you experience one, it is the most amazing thing you ever have. I know women reading this will be saying: "Men! That's all they ever think about, what about us, we need orgasms too!" and I would agree with you, but for this discussion, I would like to concentrate on the significance of the male orgasm.

"Men! That's all they ever think about!"

Could this obsession, the need to have an orgasm, not just be about pleasure? Most women have orgasms that can only be described as "for pleasure," and the man also experiences deep pleasure, but that's where the similarities stop. Why do you think that is?

Could it be, that the reason that men always think about having sex (and usually an orgasm) is that this is about the creation of life, the passing on of a male's genes to a child, guaranteeing the immortality of the genes as long as his child has a child, and so on? I think that is why an orgasm is profoundly important to a man, and one reason we should start to think a little more carefully about the casualness, and lack of significance we place on orgasm.

We casually masturbate, and have casual sex, with no intention of creating a child. I am not suggesting this is wrong, just that we don't pay enough attention to its significance. We spend our days seeking pleasure, whether watching tv, drinking alcohol, buying new clothes, and we have reduced the orgasm to the same level – as just one more way to find pleasure.

But we know this pleasure is different – it feels like nothing else. You can't buy it from the shop; you can't make it; you can't see it; you can't touch it; and most of us can't describe it exactly. It just is. And it is exactly

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

the same when we are experiencing it, we just are; no thoughts, no worries, no problems. For one short moment in life, we just are, without politics, religion, media, culture or teachers. Without conditioning or conforming. How many moments are like this in your life?

That's why I think you should place significance upon this event. An event which lasts only seconds, but could pass on your genes for an eternity. An event that is love.

Think about this the next time you ejaculate inside someone you don't love, or masturbate to pornography. "Am I treating my orgasm in the same way as I treat shopping, tv, or going to the pub? Is this just superficial pleasure or something more profound?"

Most of you would say: "Don't be so serious, it's just a bit of harmless fun," but just think the next time you have an orgasm: "I could create life." This makes you a powerful individual, a creator, a man with great responsibilities.

You are the only person in the world who can create an individual that is one half of you. Just think about that. Every orgasm is pleasure, but that pleasure is the reward of creating life, not about having fun, although that's what it feels like to most of us.

*I am a creator, I create life.
I live eternally through my genes.
I am powerful and strong.
I acknowledge my importance in the world.
I take personal responsibility for my actions.*

[Back to Index](#)

P

Paper

1. *A material made of cellulose pulp derived mainly from wood or rags or certain grasses*
2. *Medium for written communication*

Have a look round you, I bet you're surrounded by it. It seems an unavoidable modern fact. We use lots and lots of paper. Although the dictionary definition tells us that paper may be made from rags or certain grasses, most paper we use derives from wood.

Although wood (*the hard fibrous lignified substance under the bark of trees*) is a renewable resource, we must also recognise the time it takes for trees to grow. Some of these trees have been around for several hundred years and support a diverse range of animals, plant life, insects, and birds (including our own species). So when unscrupulous loggers cut down rainforests and ancient trees, you may understand why people get a little bit rattled (oh, that's the tree hugging hippies by the way, not anyone else, they don't care).

Given the time it takes for a tree to grow, we can certainly fell it pretty quickly, either with a manual saw, or Man's more popular tool, the chainsaw. Trees that have been in existence for a hundred years, fall in seconds and crash to earth. No longer will you hear the wind whistling through its branches, no longer will the birds sing from the treetops, now all there will be is an empty space.

The funny thing is, I've never seen logging operations near to where I live, have you? In fact, I've never seen them in any great quantity anywhere; so either I'm blind, or maybe they aren't cutting down as many trees as we say they are. But perhaps they're not being cut down in an area we live in, and maybe not even the in same country.

For what? A flyer for two for one pizza, and a free two litre cola, that goes straight from the printer to your bin!

Admittedly, wood has been an important natural resource for humans. We have used it to build ships, make furniture such as tables and beds, construct our houses, make flooring – the uses of wood are endless, and let's face it, it looks nice as well.

As I sit here writing this topic, I look around my room to see what is made of wood. There is the bed, the table I sit at, the wardrobe, the chair, the door, the window frame and finally, the floor. That's a lot of wood! I only hope it came from a sustainable resource, but I'll never know will I? I will leave you for a moment to consider what you use wood for, what items are in your house. Take a good look around, and ask yourself, "do I know where this wood came from? Was the item made from an ancient forest that was cut down to make my table, or is it from a sustainable forest?" These are questions I never asked in the past, but they are vitally important, unless you can think of a way of making trees grow faster than we are cutting them down, which is happening all over the world. By people. For what? Money.

Let me tell you a short story.

Several years ago, when I was living in australia, an item of news came on the television. It was tree-hugger activists trying to save an ancient forest in tasmania. They were occupying the trees to stop loggers cutting them down. They campaigned tirelessly to government, and although people with an environmental conscience on the mainland were supportive, the local logging community were up in arms. "What are we going to do?" "What will happen to our families?" "Without logging we would be penniless, and jobless." "Don't destroy our livelihoods." Seems fair enough!

You see, if the loggers can't cut down trees anymore, they will me made redundant, they will start claiming unemployment benefit, which the taxpayer will have to cover, the government will be made to look bad for not providing adequate employment, the economy will start to suffer, consumer confidence will decrease, and people will stop spending, and there's an election coming up next year. Best do what the loggers want, after all they do all traditionally vote for us, we wouldn't want to lose that.

So what happened? After angry scenes where the prime minister met the loggers (who you remember, are cutting down an ancient forest that took hundreds of years to grow, and is an essential part of the local (and global) ecosystem), the government reached a deal with them. They would include a small part of the forest in the national park, and the loggers were free to cut down the rest!

"On the whole, a positive deal for the environment and the local economy," I believe the prime minister said, or even if he didn't, that's what he believed he had achieved. Balance.

An undeniable connection

I don't know if you have ever cut down a tree. I have. With a chainsaw. Fortunately, it wasn't anything like

the size of the ancient forests of tasmania or the amazon.

My friend lived in the countryside next to a small forest, and wanted more wood for the winter for his fire, and rather than looking for a tree that had already fallen, he wanted to cut one down for himself.

“Are we allowed to do this?” I asked.

“Of course. The wood doesn't *belong* to anybody, it's public land.”

So we set about getting him his fuel supply for the winter. Seems fair enough. If he uses wood to heat his house through a wood burning stove, then he wouldn't be using non-renewable sources like coal and oil. On the whole a win, win for the environment, wouldn't you say?

I cut down the tree – being careful not to chop my leg off with the chainsaw – in less than five minutes. I won't try to convince you that I could hear it wailing as it gently crashed to earth, I was only concerned with whether we'd get caught, and if we'd get into trouble. Awareness of the importance of trees was still a long way off in my mind.

But today, as I sit here writing this topic I look out over a magnificent group of trees. Tall in stature, with solid trunks, they stand gently moving in the breeze, I see birds flying amongst them. I don't know how old they are, but I'd take a guess at between fifty and a hundred years. Yesterday I stood by the trees, and placed my hands upon them (I had to see what all these tree-huggers were going on about all this time). There was no instant connection, no surge of energy through my bones, but as I stood back and looked at them, I suddenly got it.

Even if I wanted to, I couldn't cut these trees down now. I could not imagine the cold hard steel of a blade going into its bark. I suddenly realised that these trees were not just sources of wood as I had considered them before, these were living things. If I wanted any evidence of that, I just had to look at the root systems reaching out in every direction, holding this massive tree steadfast, despite the weight and height of it. I hadn't noticed before how amazing these natural structures were. The tree that is visible is just the beginning.

These trees and the earth were intertwined. They are not meant to be separated by hand. Cutting into a tree is like severing an artery in your body. I just stood there. Suddenly I could imagine the cold blade of the chainsaw cutting into my flesh and how it would feel. I had never considered a tree like this before. It wasn't, as some would call it, a “spiritual” experience (I don't like the overuse of words that refer to supernatural concepts) – it was more like a connection.

I realised once and for all, how important every plant and every tree, with their root systems taking food from the earth and growing to give life (oxygen) to us were. How foolish I had been, cutting down that tree, I thought. I had severed an artery to the earth, that couldn't be good!

But we need fuel, we need chairs and tables, and wood provides so much, and it is a renewable resource. So although I have this feeling we are severing some kind of connection to the earth that may be important, I do recognise we are draining the life blood from the whole planet every day; and oil, and coal are not renewable (well not in the next million years or so), so isn't it better to plant trees precisely for the purpose of cutting them down and salvaging other trees that have already fallen? This would leave the natural ancient forests alone and not damage the already delicate ecosystem even more than we have done already. What do you think? This is already being done in many countries as a way of tackling the growing problems we are creating. By what you ask? Why of course, by our usual over consumption.

The paperless office

Do you remember when computers first came out? They were going to revolutionise the office! No longer would people be printing out huge reports every day. No longer would memo's use up valuable paper, they would be sent electronically. Even invoices would be electronic. But it never happened. In fact what we have now is electronic communication plus the paper!

It turned out that not only did humans prefer having something solid in their hand to look at, there was also a legal requirement on companies to keep all of their documentation for several years. From invoices to financial reports. The paperless office was dead. Long live paper.

There is something about reading a report or even a book on the screen which doesn't feel right. Maybe it's because we aren't used to it because we've been using paper for hundreds of years.

At all the companies I have worked for, everyone printed out an awful lot of “stuff” that was read once,

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

and thrown in the bin. Its acceptable now as they use paper recycling, so we don't feel so bad about being wasteful, but shredded paper does not supply oxygen.

I cannot stand to see the waste in companies. People seem to be quite responsible at home, but when they get to work, they just lose interest, as if it's someone else's problem. Which, if you think about it, it is.

All change in business is driven from the top down. So if the management aren't doing it, don't expect the staff to be. The staff may even talk amongst themselves saying "Oh, it's a real waste I know, but what can you do?" I tell you what you can do. You can talk to your management and tell them how important it is not to waste paper, whether it is in the form of invoices, reports or packaging – in products bought or sold. For the management (and for the government who demand all reports are kept on paper) I have only one thing to say. This planet depends on trees. Let's keep them where they belong. Attached.

Newspapers, magazines, books, receipts, cards, bills. They all use paper; as do the almost incessant advertising materials we get through the door. How do we know where this paper has come from? Has the receipt I was given when I bought some oranges been sourced from a sustainable forest? Did the wood it was created with even originate on the same continent? Have you asked yourselves about the people who cut it down? What were their intentions for the wood? Did they just see it as a commodity to be sold for money?

Well, going on what we know about the logging trade, it's a pretty brutal industry. In Thailand, they use elephants to move the logs which is bad enough, but you may not know that some unscrupulous loggers repeatedly inject them with amphetamines (speed) to keep them working unbearable hours. They eventually die from mistreatment or exhaustion.

Destruction of nature is brutal, and requires the hand of a brutal man. Is that fair? Am I being unnecessarily unkind? To have such disregard for nature and our planet bears the hallmark of one who cares only about what he can get for himself, namely, money. So what can you do, assuming you want to do something?

Well there is one thing. We need to control where all the paper comes from. We need to monitor the loggers. We need to make sure the source is sustainable. This would all be very nice, but what we really need to do is use less (and recycle more). Be mindful of your paper and cardboard consumption. One sure sign you are using a lot is if you buy pre-processed, pre-packaged food, or products that have not been sourced locally. Factory produced, supermarket sold products will all have come with a mass of packaging. They have to be packed like that in order to be shipped all over the world. Think about it.

Try to remember the image of the connection I described earlier. For every product you buy, for every report or page you print from the internet, for every receipt you hold, for every book you buy. Visualise. If there is no connection there then by all means do what you like, you will anyway.

Please though, stop printing advertising material. Right now. For most of us it is worthless junk, and for the advertisers they have to send out thousands just to get a couple of replies. They may see it as cost effective because paper is cheap, but the cost to the environment is not. By stopping printing advertising material, we would also cut down on inks which come from oil, electricity in the printing process, and fuel for the delivery.

If you want to advertise why not do it the new way – through the internet! There are many search engine companies that specialise in this, where the people who come to your site are already interested in YOU! How many of you could say you know that the customers are interested in your product just by sending it out to random households.

Please stop it. It is bad for our planet, it causes a lot of extra waste and litter, and most people aren't interested in your products.

The tree that bears witness to your sorrow and joy

Silent

Never judging

Always present

So trees have been round for a long time. I don't know how old the oldest tree in the world is, but it certainly will be several hundred years old or more. Think about that for a moment.

My mother has lived in the same house for over thirty years. I grew up there, and through all the happy and the sad times, the new girlfriends, the failed relationships, the new jobs and unemployment, the credit

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

card bills, the new cars, my parents divorce, and my mother's unhappiness; the tall oak watched over us. "It is just a tree," you say, but it came to me recently that this tree had seen a lot. It was there long before us, and it would be there long after my mother sells her house.

People and products have come and go in that house, but the one constant thing is the tree. Every year it sheds its leaves in autumn, and grows new ones in spring. It isn't interested in our life. It just is. We have probably gone through many of the same size trees in our time there with all the packaging we have consumed, yet the tree says nothing.

I wonder if trees have memory? If they do, every tree in the world would have a million unbiased stories to tell.

So as we come to the end of this topic I look up at the tall trees swaying in the wind wondering what future there is for them here. I will be long gone before they finally fall to earth, unless one of us intervenes earlier. Then fifty years of growing would be finished in an instant. The same as when a bullet erases a wonderful life. Let us treat each other with respect. We, the humans, rely on the trees so much yet, we cut them down without a thought. Imagine what we would do without them.

Endnote: I am attempting to find a publisher who uses recycled paper and vegetable printing ink. I will let you know how I get on, as I am painfully aware that I may seem hypocritical for printing this book when I am talking about the volume of paper we waste. It makes no difference whether I can justify it or not. The ends can never justify the means. I can only hope that for every book someone buys, they offset it by using less paper in the office or the home.

You can, if you wish, download a copy so you can read it on one of the neat new electronic book readers! And it will be cheaper! That should please you.

The choice is yours. Although I am guessing that if you are reading this, you will have already made your choice!

[Back to Index](#)

Parents

1. *A father or mother; one who begets or one who gives birth to or nurtures and raises a child;
a relative who plays the role of guardian*

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

So here it is folks. The definitive guide to parenting!
Everything you've always wanted to know about how to be a successful parent!

You wish! Sorry for misleading you in the title, but when we become parents we want to know everything, don't we? We haven't got a clue what to do with this little bundle of joy when he or she arrives. All we know is, he's ours, and we have a responsibility to protect him, and help him grow up to be a fine upstanding member of society. So how do we do it?

Well, most people muddle through it. Some spoil their children rotten and smother them with love, and some others are guilty of no less than neglect. But most people sit somewhere in the middle, happily teaching their children to read and write, learn right from wrong, learn acceptable behaviour and non acceptable behaviour. They help them with their homework, teach them how to manage money, tell them about sex, teach them about the dangers of strangers, and generally help them to prepare for adult life.

If they have done their job well the child will happily leave the nest after the age of eighteen, only to keep coming back for money and a bit more support for many years to come! But all parents really want is for their children to be happy. Right?

Some people discipline (*the act of punishing*) their children physically with a smack on the bottom or worse (something that is now frowned upon in some countries), and all punish by threatening to take away privileges, toys etc. Many will also encourage with the promise of a reward if they are well behaved, and shout or send them to their room, or a “naughty corner,” if they're not.

Hey mum, I'm not a dog

All parents want is for their children to “play nicely,” “share,” “be good,” and “don't argue,” things that people seem to quickly forget once they get older, but then re-iterate when they have their own children.

They want them to behave and be quiet (as the old saying goes: “children should be seen and not heard”), especially when there are other adults around, because let's face it, it's embarrassing having a screaming child in public. Don't worry, you can always give it some sweets or shout at it depending on what sort of mood you're in.

Don't get me wrong, it's hard bringing up a child, it's not all fun and games, and they can be pretty testing on your nerves, especially when you're trying to get the shopping and you're laden down with bags. The last thing you want is something demanding your attention all the time.

But you love your child, and so you keep going; sometimes shouting and screaming back at him if he tests your patience. But he has to learn who's boss, doesn't he? He has to know you are in charge and won't tolerate any of his nonsense. You must put your foot down and lay down the law (kind of like the government does to you) for him. He must not be allowed to get away with unacceptable behaviour. He must learn. You will make him learn.

**

I have told you this many times before but I used to be the proud “owner” (I don't like that word) of a beautiful labrador puppy. He had such a cute face, and big fluffy paws, and you wanted to cuddle him all the time. But sometimes, just sometimes, I could have killed him (literally).

He used to eat my shoes, crap all over the carpet and pee anywhere, at any time. He constantly pulled on the lead, and if you locked him downstairs at night he would whine and whine. He was a real pain in the neck, but I loved him; so I kept going with him, chastising him in public by yanking his lead or giving him the occasional smack on the bottom when he did really “bad” things. But I looked after him well, I always bought him new toys to play with, and gave him a wide selection of doggy chews, and I made sure he went out for plenty of walks in the country or down by the sea which he loved.

As he got older, I didn't have to discipline him as much. He knew if he did something wrong I would shout at him, or smack his bottom, so he calmed down a lot. I'd have to say he was turning into a really “good dog.”

“I don't treat my child like a dog” I hear some of you shouting, “my child is not an animal, I just teach him manners, that's all.”

But of course, you *do* treat your children a bit like circus animals! You teach them a few tricks and away they go, and if they don't do what you say, you punish them.

You feed them, love them (you say), and keep them out of mischief. But what you really do is what

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

society has been doing to you your whole life. You are controlling them.

“Nonsense, what we are doing is pointing them in the right direction” you argue. But when you control a car, don't you “point it in the right direction.”

Do this, don't do that, do this, no do it this way. This way. Not like that! And then you get frustrated and angry, walk off, slam a door, or shout. But all you are trying to do is point them in the right direction, right?

*Do your homework. Stick in at school. Study more. Study harder.
Focus on your school work. Be polite to the teachers. Don't argue.
Sit down. Come here. Hurry up. Be quiet.
Good dog...*

And then your beloved child makes a mistake (*a wrong action attributable to bad judgement or ignorance or inattention*) and boy does he know it.

“Why did you do that? Hmm? Tell me? What were you thinking? Why did you behave like that?”

But as we both know, a mistake means that there is a right and a wrong, not just opinion, but who's to say what the child did is wrong? You? Society?

“Go to your room, you've been a bad, bad boy! No supper for you tonight!”

Incidentally you may think I've got a cheek for writing about parenting when I don't have any children of my own, but I have been a child remember? So I think that qualifies me.

“Don't touch that, it's hot. Don't touch that, it's sharp. Don't play with those, they're dangerous. Don't talk to anybody you don't know. Don't eat that, it's disgusting. Wash your hands. Wash your face.”

“But we're just protecting our delicate children, every parent would do the same, it's a dangerous world out there.”

Yes it is. All created by adults (who used to be children)

How do you think your children would get on if you just let them be.
I mean really let them be?

We stop them from exploring the world, and then when they get older, we encourage it. How confusing is that? Children are quick learners, but we must make sure they are protected at all times. We couldn't bear it if something bad happened to them, could we? So we wrap them in cotton wool, and save them from the terrible monsters that are out there, which we in fact put into their heads by reading them scary stories (the imagination doesn't know they are just make believe), and they grow up being afraid of the world, because we told them to “be afraid, be very afraid.” So the child does what it's told and is afraid. Nice work!

So what would happen if you didn't follow all the rules on parenting? What would happen if you just let your child grow up? What would happen to it? Would it be no more than a wild animal with no social skills, and if so, does that mean we aren't the most intelligent species on the planet, we just pretend to be because of all the nice conditioning in our minds?

So go on, you tell me! What would your child be like if you didn't shout, didn't put him or her in the naughty corner, didn't chastise him for making a mistake, didn't punish him because he didn't do what you told him, didn't force him or her to conform to tradition and society, didn't force him to go to school to be conditioned, and finally didn't teach him to compete.

Perhaps life would be pretty boring for you, maybe it would be more challenging, maybe your friends, family and neighbours would ostracise you, maybe society would. Are you willing to take that chance? If so, read on, otherwise you can always use the book to throw at your kids if they're making too much noise.

A simple silence

Thanks, I'm glad you decided to read on. All the people who put the book down at the last paragraph are going to miss out, but that's their loss.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

As people get older, they get less and less able to tolerate loud noise, and some of them (like me) even go off to monasteries for a bit of peace and quiet away from tv and advertising and cars and buses and bars and restaurants and offices and factories!

Suddenly Ssshhhh. The silence is incredible. The silence of the wind and the trees. The silence of nature. Yet it is not quiet – there is movement, but it is harmonic. There is balance. There is stillness. Now shhhhhhh. And calm your mind for a moment. Nice and calm. Breathe deeply and relax. I think we can begin.

A child is born. A wonderful screaming baby. It's a girl, say the doctors. And you smile. What love between a mother and a baby. There is no bond like it. Such wonder and joy as you hold her safely in your arms.

Now fast forward ten years...

“Hurry up, you're going to be late for school. Have you got your homework. Well where is it? I don't have time for all this, I'm going to be late for work too. Oh for gods sake! Well if you can't find it you're not going over to your friends this evening, do you hear me (shouting up the stairs) Do you hear me!!”

Now back to the delivery room. And you hold your baby. Tired and exhausted from the hours of labour but you feel calm. God how you love this child. You will always protect her.

Now fast forward three years.... “Stop crying!!!! What's WRONG with you? No, you can't watch tv, no you can't have any dessert. In fact, go to your room until you can be nice to mummy, all right?”

Now back to the delivery room. And she sleeps in a little cot next to you, her eyes tightly closed her hands tiny but perfect.

Now fast forward fifteen years... “A boyfriend, no he's not coming over. No arguments. You're too young to have a boyfriend. What if you get pregnant what will you do then, eh? I won't be looking after it, I can tell you. You'll have to leave school and you won't be able to get a job.... No, is my final answer. Just go upstairs and do your homework.”

Now back to the delivery room, and she lets out a little yawn and her perfect little fingers and toes uncurl. What wonder in nature. What amazing creation can come from one act.

Ok, so I think you get the picture. It all starts off nice and peaceful, but as time goes on, the demands of society on you and your children take their toll; and as you are not sure what society wants from you, you conform, and you make sure your kids conform as well. After all, it's the law.

But that's not how it has to be, you probably know that deep in your heart as well, don't you? We don't want to control our children, we just want them to have a happy (law abiding) life. We just want them to do well, after all, it makes *us* proud. And we like to be proud, don't we?

More silence

The one thing I have noticed about people with children, is that their houses are very, very noisy. The kids are running around shouting, the parents are shouting at the children and each other. In short, they are what you would call mildly chaotic!

“And so you see,” you say, “that's why we have to get the children to behave, that's why we have to use discipline, otherwise it would be even noisier.”

But have you ever considered that it is the lifestyle you have chosen by conforming to society that is creating this “chaos” in the first place? Perhaps not.

You are told that your children need stimulation in order for their brains to develop. So you constantly play games with them, and buy them artificial toys like fire engines and police cars that have wailing sirens. As they get older, you buy them computer game consoles that have even more noise in them, and you shout at them to do their homework, and to “come down for dinner” and to “go to their room.” You take them out to play sport and more sport. You get them a hobby, then another hobby, and take them to the cinema and read books to them, and teach them maths, and shout at them to concentrate and to pay attention.

Unfortunately, what none of you seem to realise, is that in order for the brain to develop true intelligence, and gain awareness and insight it needs space, lots of it and that space is called silence.

So it all starts with you I'm afraid. You need to create a life for yourself that is calm and peaceful. How

else will a child learn? And I'm not talking about learning things to pass exams at school, those are mere tools so they can get jobs and join the wheel, I am talking about them learning what it is to be human, something people think is a thing you do when you get older, once you have gone through the growing up process.

How many children learn of compassion and love?

You may say you love your children, but those are just words, I'm afraid.

How many children learn of nature in its entirety, not by reading silly school books but by being taught to observe themselves, their thoughts and their feelings and just to sit and watch?

No, that would be stupid wouldn't it? We have to fill these young minds up as quickly as possible! There's no time to lose. They must study and study (external things) so they can become a valued member of the society, get a good job and contribute. That is the important thing, not this new-age mumbo jumbo about being aware of yourself. "If he wants to learn that, he can, but after he's finished his exams, he mustn't be distracted now."

But all a child wants to do is to explore and learn in his own time, he needs time to process the world he is living in, not have it rammed down his throat so he can get an "A plus" in his exams; do you see? It is so sad for me to stand by and watch children being created by parents into what they think the child *should* be, as opposed to just letting the child be.

Will you not let them be?

For parents who want their children to be quiet they seem to be going about it the wrong way. Rather than leading by example and not over stimulating their own brains, they are constantly talking and discussing and arguing all above the noise of the satellite tv or the music system. Then they over stimulate their children by keeping them on the go all the time (it's no wonder that adhd seems to be becoming more and more prevalent). Go, go, go, go, go, go, that's all it ever is. Achieve, achieve, achieve, achieve. Learn, learn, learn, learn. Behave, behave, behave, behave. It's a wonder that everyone's brains don't just explode with all of this stimulation!

I have a quick question. What do you think a child would be like if he was brought up in a monastery? I don't mean would he be religious, I mean what kind of personality would he develop? What sort of mind would he develop in the silence. A dead mind or an enquiring mind?

Fortunately we don't all have to go and live in monasteries if we want silence. We can create it at home, but remember, we must lead, we must show the way.

So we will have to get rid of our flat screen tv and satellite system to start with, and we can't have any computer game consoles, because not only are they addictive, but tend to over stimulate the mind, and we have to set out times when we eat together, in a state of calmness, so you may have to find work that doesn't involve so much rushing around.

"But it's impossible," you say.

But remember, you are the one who is creating the environment, and you are in charge! Mealtimes have to become calmer and a time when we can sit together quietly. Do you want to stop reading now? And perhaps a time could be set aside when you both just sit. I mean sit. And do nothing. Together. You don't need any special training or equipment just sit in a nice space with a candle to create some atmosphere if you like, but it's not necessary.

Above all, you have to become aware of yourselves. You have to gain some insight into your own minds, and start to slow down, to start to relax your minds more. Are you with me so far? And remember, you haven't had the kids yet!

Once you have the children you have to carry on with this intentional (*characterized by conscious design or purpose*) state you are creating, there is no point in saying "Oh, we don't have time, we've got kids you know." But children don't keep you busy, you create the busyness and then blame the kids when they get a bit hyper.

Stop buying them toys!

Lots of space remember, that's what we are trying to create here. So don't buy your kids noisy toys, in fact, don't buy anything from companies who profess to know what they're doing when it comes to children's development, instead create a toy yourself for them, something you have spent time on, it means so much to any child growing up. Even give them something from nature to play with (we all know the stories where someone bought their child an expensive toy and the child threw it to one side and played with the box!).

Why do you need an expensive adding up toy when you can give a child ten stones?

“But we want to give them things, we want to show them we love them,” I hear you shout, “why shouldn't we give them the best we can afford! Who are you to tell us what we can or can't do?”

And you're right, you don't have to listen to me; in fact, I positively want you to go out and test everything I am saying; but plastic toys made in a far away country by some poor worker (who also may be a child) on a pound a day, don't help children understand where they come from, and what they are – toys from nature do. Try it out.

We spend billions each year on toys for our children. Toys they play with and get bored with. So we can make them a new toy, or we can get them to help us with it. Do you understand?

Parenting isn't a one way process; parenting is like this book, a dialogue between two people. We should be asking the children questions instead of filling their delicate minds with second hand knowledge. We should be asking them to question us, to explore nature with their minds, not getting them to repeat what they have read parrot fashion. If you want that, buy a parrot!

Creating stillness

Instead of encouraging our children to compete, which is, after all, one of the big problems in our adult society, we should be teaching them to cooperate; and instead of teaching them to chase success, we should be teaching them about insight.

I'm sure a lot of you are saying: “this all sounds easy on paper, but it wouldn't work in the real world, as our children have to go to school by law, and they will be influenced by other children who don't have parents teaching them all this good stuff – parents who have satellite televisions and computer games. Won't our children be jealous. What then?”

Unfortunately, the way society is organised makes it difficult for any parent who wants to do the right thing, or to just let their children grow up, without conditioning them, or putting expectations on them, and if you choose to teach your child at home, they still have to follow the exam structure, it is the LAW! So you have to be careful.

There is no easy answer to this most difficult of problems, but by gaining insight yourself you will see the way. Do you understand? There is no point in getting a child to take one path if you are on another.

As we bring this discussion to a close, I have a few words to offer you. When both ourselves, and our children, learn stillness (*calmness without winds*), the mind will develop in ways you could never imagine, but if you fill a mind with noise, anger, shouting, knowledge, conditioning, conforming, then where is the space for the mind to develop? Unfortunately, the people in charge of education will never see it, because they just want your child to get a job so he can start paying his taxes. But as I said before, don't take my word for it.

If we know that in order to progress, we have to jump off the wheel, then it is our responsibility to help guide our children in such a way that they never get on the wheel, but to do that you are going to have to stop shouting, stop demanding and stop criticising.

But what do I know? I don't have any children. The government system knows best what to do with a child's mind, after all, look what they have done for ours.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Stop blaming the children
Let them be
Let them experience silence
Let them experience what it is like to be still
Let their minds grow

[Back to Index](#)

Passion

1. *Strong feeling or emotion*
2. *The trait of being intensely emotional*
3. *Something that is desired intensely*
4. *An irrational but irresistible motive for a belief or action*
5. *A feeling of strong sexual desire*
6. *Any object of warm affection or devotion*

What are you passionate about? Anything? It's strange to hear the word “passion,” isn't it ? It seems it doesn't often get used these days. Maybe the reason we don't hear it anymore is because it's an old fashioned word that has been replaced by a new one. What could the word be I wonder? Oh yes, how about apathy (*an absence of emotion or enthusiasm*).

Every day; every place I go; on every street corner; I see it. A total lack of enthusiasm. Every morning on public transport, you can see it on people's faces as they trundle along to work. Before you blame the time, I know it's early in the morning, so some people may not be quite awake, but that's the point.

They are tired, so very tired, from getting up early every day, spending hours on the train, the bus or underground (or if they're unlucky, a combination of all three), doing the same job, day in day out for a little bit of money, tied to monotony, due to financial commitments caused primarily by borrowing huge amounts of money to buy your own house (even though it takes you 25 years to pay back the money to the bank). So you trundle on. Every day. Every week. Every year.

I'm not saying you don't like your job, far be it for me to interfere in your choice of occupation; you may go as far as to say you love your job, that it is a satisfying career, and you are glad you do it! But where is the passion?

I have always liked my jobs. They were always satisfying and interesting. I used to enjoy going to work every day. I used to enjoy playing sport in the evening, going to the pub for a few drinks, going out for a meal, or maybe going to the cinema, and get up again the next morning for another day of work. I was quite happy. Half asleep, but quite happy.

I really enjoyed work, but I wouldn't say I was passionate about it. To me someone who was passionate was probably a little obsessive!

I used to know someone who was passionate about rugby. He would go to every game, home and away, and his whole conversation in the pub was centred around his passion for the game. He had played when he was younger, was involved in his local team helping youngsters, and even when he was dressed casually he'd always have a rugby shirt on. “Wow!” I thought, “he's totally obsessed (*having or showing excessive or compulsive concern with something*) with the game; that can't be healthy.” But what I was missing out on was that he was passionate. He cared so much, and he was prepared to do anything to help the game of rugby.

On reflection, I admire him for it.

So I ask you once again, what are you passionate about? It could be your work, your community, your sport, your hobbies, anything. But you have to be truly passionate, not just “quite interested.” Let's change tack for a moment while you ponder that question.

**

The word passion is more commonly used when referring to a couple. “They were entwined in a passionate embrace.” What does that mean to you? How does thinking about that make you feel?

Try to think of the last time you had a passionate embrace, and try to imagine the two of you standing or lying down, looking into each others eyes. You can almost feel the flames of passion coming out of every pore. The way you clasp each other in your arms and squeeze each other like you have never squeezed anyone before. You cannot hold them any more tightly than this or they would stop breathing, but you can't stop. You touch them all over. Your heart beats faster, your breathing becomes more shallow, you can think of nothing else but holding the one you love. You are them, and they are you. You become one. Integrated in the moment.

Ok, now hold it there. Keep that feeling in place for a moment. Visualise it. Hold it in your mind, in your heart, in your blood stream, in your lungs, in your legs, and your arms. You've got it! Now take that feeling and keep it there, inside. That's passion – portable style!

**

A moment ago I asked you what you were passionate about. After the last experience we visualised together, can you honestly tell me that what you feel for rugby, football or your job compared with that?

We all have that passion inside us, ready to be awakened, but for most of us, that passion stops when we leave the bedroom. But imagine taking it with you, I mean really. What amazing things you could do when the passion is ignited.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

I discovered this by accident. I discovered that by developing awareness of myself, awareness of my surroundings, I started to notice things. Things that just didn't seem right. The more I saw pain, suffering, greed and apathy the more angry I became. I saw pain everywhere I looked. I could not believe I hadn't noticed this before. I was probably too busy being passionate about running or my girlfriends.

Something started to brew inside me that was more than anger. I could feel the flames being ignited inside my whole being. Why did I care so much? Why was I interested in things I had never been before? Why did I notice things so much? I would have preferred just to carry on with my old life, but I couldn't do it. Suddenly I realised what had happened.

I became passionate about life

I feel the same right now as I'm writing this. I can feel the flames inside me, and they will not extinguish. The flames of love. The flames of compassion. The flames of empathy. Can you feel it? That you love life so much it hurts (maybe not just yet!); that you will not rest until others feel it too? Not in an intellectual way that says: "Oh yes, I understand what you're talking about," but in the same way you feel passion when you are embracing someone you love?

Passion about life is the same feeling. The interconnectedness of it all. The link between my blood and the tree. The link between my self and the other selves around the world. The link between my compassion and your hatred. The understanding that you are part of life and it is part of you. There is no escaping – only denial that everything is linked.

So what do you do with your new found passion? Do you, like me, decide to write a book to help others understand what it is to be passionate about life, or do you sell up everything and decide to become a monk? Or do you carry on doing what you've been doing, working in your same job, doing the same things you used to do. Going to the same pubs, the same restaurants, the same football games...

I wish I could say you could have this passion and just carry on like nothing ever happened, but I'm sorry, it doesn't seem to work like that. Often I have actively considered giving up the lifestyle I created, and going back to a nice job in information technology, eating meat again, having a laugh down the pub with mates about nothing in particular, purchasing a nice three bedroom suburban house, with a nice labrador to go out for walks with, three kids, and a fat mortgage. But I just can't.

Sometimes I feel deep pain inside when I realise that there is no turning back. For me, life is a one way ticket, no returns. I cannot go back to my old way of living. My body is the same but my mind is not.

I cannot show you what to be passionate about, nor can I force you to be passionate when you are not. All I can do is show you my passion and hope it triggers something in you. The problems in the world can be solved by you, by being passionate about wanting to help, about wanting to make a difference, about wanting to help others and become more compassionate.

It may just be coincidence, but passion is only three letters away from the word compassion.

Kindle the flame inside

[Back to Index](#)

Past

1. *The time that has elapsed*
2. *A verb tense that expresses actions or states in the past*
3. *Earlier than the present time; no longer current*

When is the past? Now? Now? Then? Now? By the time it takes you to read this it is already in the past. If you want to prove it, all you have to do is sit with a watch and look at the second hand...36...37...38...39...40... All life is past.

So when someone talks about having had a past life, theoretically they are telling the truth! After all, your past life could have been just one second ago. One second ago you could have been a murderer, a drug addict or a dictator, but that was in the past. Now is now. And now is now. And now is now. Do you understand? You have to move fast to keep up.

However you look at time, it is never still, always moving; but we must not be fooled by our watch, that is a man-made device. All I know is that the sun comes up in the morning and goes down in the evening and repeats the very next day. This regulates my internal body clock and that of the planet. I also am getting older, which I assume has something to do with time.

For the sake of this discussion let's talk about time in the way we know it. Seconds, minutes and days. Hopefully you now understand that the last word, "word" is now in the past, and no matter how much you try, you cannot force it to be in the future, or in the present, unless you re-read it.

As you approach "word," it is still in the future, it is still not decided, but as soon as you the letter "w" you are in the present, if only momentarily. "O" follows, and now "w" is in the past. "R" follows "o" and now "w" and "o" are in the past. Utter the last letter "d" and now "wor" are in the past. As you complete it, the whole word, "word" becomes past! Confused? I am.

Ok, so as long as we're clear, let us move on.

One of the things often said to older people is that they are "living in the past." I'm sure you may have thought it about your grandparents, and I've even said it to my mother!

Old people like to reminisce, don't they? "I remember the time when..." It bores me to tears. They repeat the same old story again and again. I am never quite sure if they know they are repeating it, or whether they even know they are boring us. For me, long drawn out stories about the war, and the "good old days" just aren't interesting, but they are for older parents and grandparents. Why do you think that is?

My mother is 74 now. She is fit and healthy of mind. She goes to the gym nearly every day and does weights and yoga, yet I often become bored with her stories. As I have said in previous topics, my father left us when I was 14, and my mother has never gone out in search of another partner. She also has no close friends who come round to the house, although she has an extrovert personality; and so the only thing she does in the "present" is to go to her gym and go shopping. As someone who loves talking, she often tells stories, but the one thing I'm sure even she isn't aware of, is that most of these stories stem from before she was married, or from times when she was happiest. I'm sure this is normal, after all, you don't normally mention times that were unhappy.

"You've gotta get some new stories mum"

This is one thing I say over and over to my mum, and I'm sure it has started to upset her; but the reason she has no new stories is because she doesn't do anything new, and if you don't do anything new, the only place you can fall back on is the past. How many older people do you know who do the same thing?

How many young people do you know? Young people have a different outlook on life, don't they? Always exploring, ever challenging, always attempting something new. They can tell you something new they did one minute ago, then they're off again. Older people just haven't got the energy to do new things as often, and it must annoy them when we tell them to stop living in the past, but as we discovered a moment ago, the past can be as close as NOW.

The past they are talking about, is a place where they were happy, where they were enjoying life. A place where they had vitality and enthusiasm, not where they were tired, and old. But no matter how old you are, living in the present, the "moment," which is NOW, brings a sparkle to everyone's life.

I keep telling my mum to let go of the past, for it no longer serves her. It was an experience she had in the moment, but now it is gone, but it's so hard to let go isn't it? Especially if you've been hurt by someone, or a

person you have loved has died. The human tendency is to hang on. We are angry in the moment, but by bringing that moment which was NOW with us to this present moment which is still NOW we are living in the past!

Being angry in the moment is ok as long as you let it go. This is the key to successful living. Live now and let it go. But we are so caught up with memory and the burning desire to keep things alive; things which are actually not alive, but exist in a space between your ears.

This outcome can only be negative, because it does not allow you to live presently in joy. Carrying the memory of someone or some event or some time is attachment, which is unreal, in that reality is NOW, not then!

Have I lost you? Ok, for now, let's jump forward a moment from NOW to some point in the future, which is NOW, no NOW. Actually, a point we cannot define because it hasn't come into existence yet. This is a very strange word because it comes with so many possibilities, yet we attach so much meaning to it.

Future

1. The time yet to come

In the future... I want to be

My parents, my parents friends, and even my friends always wanted to know what I would "be" in the future. I could never answer, because at that time I was just living, as I was, with no thought for the future. Not because I was enlightened, but because I was a child, and children always live for right now! In fact I live there right NOW. This has been described by many people and you may call it living "in the moment" which we will go into later. For now let's concentrate on the invisible we wish to make visible.

Although we all know the future is undecided, people always want to know it. In fact many people go to fortune tellers and palm readers to discover what their destiny holds.

Destiny

1. An event (or a course of events) that will inevitably happen in the future

This is a word used by so many, but if the future is undecided, because it hasn't happened yet, how can there be a destiny? Is it possible that there could be a path laid out for me that is inevitable, and that even with free will, I will reach, no matter what I do to avoid it?

One of the greatest destiny predictors is the palm, where we have a lifeline, where a person skilled in reading will tell you if you are going to have a long life (or a relatively short one!) I think I had my palm read once in my local pub, but as I'd had a few drinks, I can't really remember what she said.

Looking at my palms right now, I really wonder what she saw in them. The thing is, if I close my hands slowly, the "lifelines" etc. just look like they are natural folds which help my hand to close efficiently. Have a look yourself right now. Examine your hands. See if these lines are real destiny predictors or not?

"Today, as the sun comes into mercury, and moves past venus, you will be at your most creative. Women will naturally be attracted to you, and you will find your deepest desires at the end of a bed in a house owned by a person whose name starts with j."

For many years, the stars that surround our planet have been used for everything from navigation (helpful) to newspaper astrologers (not sure if they are helpful). Professional astrologers (*someone who predicts the future by the positions of the planets and sun and moon*) as opposed to astronomers (*a physicist who studies astronomy*) will take your birth chart and give you a reading for a few pounds, which will hopefully help you understand where destiny is taking you.

I am supposedly an Aries. I was born on the 6th april 1969 at about six minutes past midnight, I think.

Aries is the ram, which is an uncastrated adult male sheep, and has many characteristics which I seem to conform to. Having met many other “rams,” I have to admit they are quite like me, and I am quite them. Weird, eh?

So what does this all mean?

Most other people I have met say they are like their star signs too. Does this mean that people can gaze into planetary constellations and read our futures? Does this mean that someone knows what is going to happen in my life before it exists? What does that mean? Does that mean that someone else “knows” my life? How is it possible? What forces are at work to foretell my life? Are there any, or is this future fortune-telling just an illusion? Are we subconsciously just conforming to what people say we are like, because we were born in a specific year on a specific date at a specific hour?

Surely anything that shows some kind of preordained path, due to “heavenly” influences, must indicate some grand plan we are all involved in? And if there is a grand plan (or path) we are all following, does this mean we must accept that there is someone or something guiding us? It all seems pretty strange that my personality type can be deduced from my birth date, but then, maybe it can.

I am still a beginner at all this stuff, but maybe one of you can enlighten me. I have always been under the impression that when a child is born its mind is a blank slate, ready to be filled with unlimited knowledge, free to make the choices, he or she wants, regardless of the environment they are born into. Free to take their own path in life, with no preordination (*theology*) *being determined in advance; especially the doctrine (usually associated with Calvin) that God has foreordained every event throughout eternity (including the final salvation of mankind)*.

Astrologers, gypsy crystal ball readers, or anyone else concerned with predicting events which have not yet occurred, are all trying to do the same thing – give us what we want: Knowledge. Not of now, but of the future.

We want to know if we will be successful, if we will be healthy, if we will have children etc. We want to know what we will *be*.

Think about this for a moment. We are not concerned with creating what we *are*, we want someone else to do the hard work for us, and let us know we will be rich, happy and successful in life. Now we can rest easy, knowing that everything will be ok. We don't care about exercising free will (*the power of making free choices unconstrained by external agencies*) in our lives, we want someone else to let us know how it will be. Do you understand?

By letting go of free will you lose your personal power to make choices. You begin to live your life according to others telling you how it will be. That's why so many of us consult fortune-tellers and ultimately turn to the greatest fortune-teller of all, religion.

If free will exists, there can be no such thing as destiny

Do you agree with this statement? Most of you probably don't because we like the idea of “my destiny,” don't we? “It is your destiny,” has a nice ring about it doesn't it? As if we are on an important path, and we have an important mission to fulfil. Somehow just “existing” isn't good enough.

Yesterday, as I was looking at lambs with their mothers, I noticed they had started grazing as well, and I realised that not only had their life just started, as far as we humans are concerned their life has ended as well. Do you follow? Their life is just one monotonous grass eating experience. Nothing more, nothing less.

They will do the same thing every day, from dawn to dusk until the day they die. They have to. It's what they do. They eat grass to survive. Nothing else is important. They won't suddenly invent a new technology which saves them having to eat so much grass, and enables them to relax more, in fact, they won't invent anything, because their brains are not structured for that kind of thinking. They are ruled by nature. Eat. Drink. Sleep. Procreate. Nurture. Eat. Drink. Sleep. Die.

We don't want a life like that do we? We are homo sapiens, the most intelligent species on the planet, we can do anything we want, we are not constrained by a small brain. We are not locked into a biological pattern that only involves eating and procreating, are we? We are free! Free to make our own decisions. Free to take our own path.

So can someone please tell me why we are so concerned with knowing our future, which is a time not

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

yet arisen, when the very act of inquiring into something non-existent robs us of what it is to be human. Namely, free will.

Present

1. *The period of time that is happening now; any continuous stretch of time including the moment of speech*

So where does this free will exist? Where in time can it exist? In the past? In the future? Of course not. You exercise your free will. Right NOW. NOW. NOW and again NOW.

*You sit outside the bank in your car
You pull your mask on
You get your gun at the ready
Your hand reaches for the handle
...?*

What happens next is up to you. Do you understand? Your hand may be on the handle of the car door, you may be *about* to get out, and *about* to run in shouting “get your hands up, give me all your money,” but you haven't. Your hand is still on the handle. It is still the present moment.

Even though it will still be the present moment when you are waving your gun around in the bank, right now it is an event which is not even in the future, as the future is undecided. You have a choice to exercise your free will in the moment, to change the course of events. Nothing is decided until it is the present moment. At that time, and only for that instant it is real. Up until then, it is nothing.

You stop for a moment, become aware of yourself, you see a lifetime ahead not of riches and luxuries but of a grey cell, bars, and in that moment which is NOW, you take off your mask, put away your gun and drive away. Do you see? In becoming aware of yourself in the moment you have created a new NOW. The future that could have involved people being shot, where there is anger, fear, and ultimately ends with either you being killed by the police, or ending up in jail for many years, no longer exists. Because it never really existed. It was just a possibility. Like all things in life.

The future does not exist. It is an illusion. There is only NOW

Possibility vs. Probability. There are those who would say that certain outcomes (*something that results*) are more probable than possible (if you put your hand on a boiling stove then you will burn yourself), but as each moment in the time leading up to the person putting their hand on the stove, it is still now. Therefore even though it is getting more probable you will burn yourself, it is still a future event which has not yet happened, and there is the opportunity in the Now to avert your hand and not burn yourself.

The key to living NOW is awareness. Awareness of yourself in action. Awareness that if you carry through an action it will have consequences, whether positive or negative. Without the awareness, the statisticians measure of probability increases, although it is not certain.

Let us return to the scenario at the bank, but this time you choose not to be aware of yourself in action, and without a second thought....

*You pull your mask on
You get your gun at the ready
Your hand reaches for the handle
You get out of the car and run towards the bank
Your hand goes to open the door
...?*

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

But just at the last second, you have a flash of awareness. You see the possibilities of the outcomes and you decide (free will) to run back to the car, take off your mask and drive home. Although it was becoming more probable you would rob the bank, right up until you do, it is an illusion, an event that is only in your mind. It is not real.

Stop for a moment. Which is now. Right NOW. And become aware of times in the past when you have not been aware of yourself. Events you have let happen because you were not aware of yourself in the moment; events you wish you had been able to change; events that up until the NOW, were only possibilities, and let them go. There is no use reliving events and wishing you had done them differently.

Let's go back to the bank one last time and see what happens when there is no awareness in action.

*You sit outside the bank in your car
You pull your mask on
You get your gun at the ready
Your hand reaches for the handle
You get out of the car and run towards the bank
Your hand goes to open the door
You run in screaming "Get down this is robbery"
"Give me all your money"
The customers scream, some cry, but one brave man tries to tackle you
You instinctively swing round. And you fire. Once. Twice
He goes down
"Give me the fucking money," you scream
They hurriedly pack some money into a bag and you run off
But someone has raised the alarm, the police are here, you are surrounded
"Put the weapon down and come out with your hands up"
You do what they say and come out. Welcomed with handcuffs
You are tried and sentenced to twelve years in prison
You are driven to the place with the grey walls and bars and assigned a number*

No matter how many times you reflect on your actions, it is too late to change them. They have already been completed, and they are, as you know, in the past, which was now! The only thing you can do with the past is to let it go.

This is not a topic about learning from your mistakes. This is about being aware in the present moment – the only reality. The NOW.

I make no apologies for repeating this word, as it is most important you understand it. Because it, and nothing else, is your best guide in life. You can only LIVE in the present moment. That is the time you are ALIVE. You are not alive in the past, that is just a memory, you cannot live in the future, that is just a mental projection. You live as your heart beats. Right Now.

So what about the people who "live in the past?" Our elderly parents and grandparents for example; what can be done to help them live in the present moment? Unfortunately, we become conditioned to living our life through memory, but by becoming aware of ourselves, and by enjoying life whatever it "throws" at us, we learn to de-condition ourselves.

It's funny we all think life throws "stuff" at us, but life isn't that clever. We create the "stuff" through our own free will. We make choices we blame on "life," but there is no such reality as "life," only billions of free wills barging into each other all around the world. There is no good, bad, past or future, just our action in the moment and the outcome.

Let's make each action in the moment a positive, joyful action. Let's live for now, this second, this moment. Live it the best you can, for all humanity, for the animals, the earth, your loved ones, my loved ones, and their loved ones.

Let us interconnect in this moment which is now, and move forward, one moment at a time with love and compassion. I can see the outcome already, oops, but there I go predicting the future again!

Stop, and let's enjoy this moment together.

[Back to Index](#)

Peace

1. *The state prevailing during the absence of war*
2. *Harmonious relations; freedom from disputes*
3. *The absence of mental stress or anxiety*
4. *The general security of public places*

I would like to start our discussion by talking about the many misconceptions of the word peace. Peace is not an absence of war. Peace is not waving two fingers in the air making the peace sign. Peace is not sitting around smoking marijuana wearing hemp clothing and talking about the cosmos. Peace is not a universal state of mind. Peace is not becoming a monk and meditating all day. Peace is not god, and you cannot fight for peace – peace is a lot closer to home than that, and it is a lot more physical, than anything so-called spiritual.

One thing's for sure, and that is you cannot force people to be at peace. If you win a battle and overcome your enemy, then the country is not at peace, only in a temporary state of “not war.” Why? Because peace is brought about by the transcendence of internal agitation and turmoil through the loving of all things and that is something that can only be achieved individually. If I am at peace, the world is at peace.

I think it's fair to say that most of us are not at peace in our lives. The general stress and strain of modern life; paying bills, dealing with relationships, holding down a job, and worrying about the future, is enough to leave us feeling internally stressed and heading for the nearest thing to make life more peaceful. Yes you got it, your old friend the ice cold beer, the rich red wine, the zesty gin and tonic, or maybe just a plain old cigarette. Take a sip, take a puff... Ahh, that's better... Peace!

Many books have been written on finding peace in your daily lives. Some people even travel to “spiritual” countries like india and tibet in search of inner peace. Some people join monasteries. Some people write songs about praying for peace, and last but not least, governments try to keep the peace. It's funny, in a world so full of violence, there seem to be a lot of people trying to find peace, or at least force it on to other people.

In other topics, we have asked the question whether Man is a naturally violent species, and we have said that although he has the tendency to express his desires violently if he doesn't get what he wants, there is nothing to suggest it is inherent in our nature. We need food and shelter to survive individually, and a mate to procreate with if we are to keep the species going, that is all; we need nothing more. As we begin our exploration of this topic together, we must also remember that peace is a man-made word, it has nothing to do with our biological heritage.

Let me start by asking you a question. Is a lion at peace? Are a herd of elephants at peace? What about the birds, are they at peace? What about a tree? These might seem like stupid questions to you, but it is of the utmost importance we find out what we mean by “peace.”

A mouse goes about his business, scurrying from place to place eating and drinking causing no visible harm to anyone else, meanwhile an owl sits on a branch quietly. Both of them could be said in human terms to be at peace. Suddenly the owl flaps his wings, leaves the branch silently, and glides towards the forest floor. Meanwhile, the mouse is still scurrying around quietly, in the darkness of night. The owl's talons extend, and he catches the mouse, lifting it high into the air. Its talons have pierced its lifeless body and the owl returns to its branch to quietly rip off the mouse's head before devouring the whole body – bones, guts, and all.

At what point did the owl stop being at peace? What do you think? Was it when it had the intention to kill a mouse, or was it when its talons actually caught the mouse? What I want to know is, was the owl ever at peace? We can see it was violent for a split second, where it caused the death of another animal, but hey, the owl was hungry and owls eat mice, the end! Can you follow this? What I am asking is whether “peace” (the word) exists in the animal world, or is it merely a man-made concept?

I think it highly unlikely that “peace” can exist, because when we apply it to the animal world, it means nothing. Animals are violent when (a) they are hungry, and are designated meat eaters, and (b) when other members of the species encroach on their territory (which affects the amount of food available for the group) and (c) when their dominance over the group is threatened which affects their ability to mate with all the females.

Animals do things to protect the survival of themselves, their group and their species, that is all. They are neither at peace, nor not at peace, do you understand? The word does not apply.

Let me explain.

I neither eat animals nor any products that have come from animals, which I do through choice. I eat nuts, fruit and vegetables etc. and I consider myself to be a “peaceful” man, in that I wouldn't hurt anyone deliberately; but just imagine for a moment that there was a shortage of food, and there weren't enough

vegetables to go round the group. What would I do, being a “peaceful” man? Would I sit there meditating whilst letting the rest of the group gorge themselves on the available food because I vowed never to hurt another?

Imagine I'd asked them kindly to share the food with me, to show some compassion for a starving man, but they just laughed and carried on eating. What would I do? Would I once again just sit down and wait for my death? I doubt it very much.

We homo sapiens are part of the animal world, as it is part of us, and we are programmed to ensure we survive, and to survive we must eat. It is that simple. So I get up and ask once again for some food. Once again I am refused, so I pick up a rock and strike the man with it, and I keep hitting him, until he gives up his share of the food. I want to survive, so I will do “whatever it takes” to survive. I think we all have to remember that we all have the potential to become violent when our biological needs are not being met.

Imagine now that I am a non-meat eater and I am in a place where there are no vegetables, fruit, or nuts. It is winter and snow covers the ground. What do I eat? Do I go hungry and starve to death because I took a vow never to harm another animal, or do I try to kill anything that will provide fuel for me to stay alive, just as the owl did? What do you think? Are my ethics worth more than life itself?

I know what I would do. I am an animal like the owl, and when I need to eat, I find something to eat, whether it be animal or vegetable. Some people may be horrified that I have said this. “You are going against everything you have said!” I hear them cry. But how do you think Man became such a successful species? He is adaptable to all environments.

I am currently writing in the north of Sweden in the middle of winter. Heavy snow has covered the ground, and nothing is growing at the moment. I am fortunate that thanks to modern growing, storage and distribution methods, I can have all the vegetables, fruit and nuts I want, as long as I have enough money.

But try to think back several hundred years or several thousand years to when Man first came to colonise this part of the world. How did he survive up here successfully? By eating whatever was available. And in the winter, that was animals, like reindeer and elk. They ate the meat and protected themselves against the freezing temperatures with their skins. That is life giving life.

If one of the groups had decided to become vegetarians, or vegans, how do you think they would have survived the winter? Once again there was no peace nor violence going on, just survival. Are you starting to see?

In the natural world, outside of our thinking, there is only survival of the species. It's not personal; there is no malice aforethought; they are not greedy; nor filled with desire, or craving power. These are man-made – of the mind. These are not things which trouble the animal kingdom. To them, peace is nothing. It is a concept invented by Man to describe the human world. A world we think is very different to the animal world; and in some ways is so far removed from it that it is no wonder people questioned how we could have ever evolved from apes, deciding that there had to be a better explanation, involving someone called “god.”

My mind is at war
My mind is at peace
My mind is at war
My mind is at peace

Instantly, division. Two states, both polar opposites. War. Peace. It can't be anything else, can it? It has to be one or the other, you are either at war or at peace. But being in one state assumes that the other state exists, just not at this moment. As we saw in the animal world it seemed silly to try to describe the owl as “being at peace,” as it is not something that could apply to it. As far as we could see, the owl was in two different states. Eating and not eating.

That does not apply to our modern society. There is far too much greed, desire, politics, power, control and domination going on. In short, there is too much thinking going on!

Peace is sometimes described as freedom from disputes, but those disputes are always going on in our minds. And it is into our minds we shall go now.

**

I realised some time ago that having a super large brain comes with several disadvantages, the first being that you have to learn to understand it, and the second, learning how to control it!

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

If we look at the amount of time the universe has been in existence, it is approximately fifteen to twenty billion years, but in universe time, that doesn't matter. What matters is that the brain of homo sapiens has only been around for around fifty thousand years in its present size. Homo habilis (*extinct species of upright east african hominid having some advanced human like characteristics*) existed only two million years ago, and his brain was about a third of the size of ours. Sorry if my statistics are wrong, but then I never was very good at statistics, but you get the picture. Universe around for long time, human brain as we know it, not around very long.

So it shouldn't be of much surprise to us that it isn't functioning correctly. We are still on brain software version 1.0, and as all we computer users know, version 1.0 is not very stable! We don't know where we are half the time; we don't know what we want, who we are, we don't know where we are going, what we want to do with our life; there are so many choices, we don't know when to be happy, when to be sad; we don't know how to act around other people etc. etc. I think it is fair to say that in biological development terms, the human brain, as we know it, is still in its infancy.

All of this confusion must lead to a certain amount of internal agitation and conflict in the mind. This is neither good nor bad, it's just part of what makes us human, but it doesn't mean we can't jump ahead of biology and transcend this conflict, which after all, is creating the external conflict in the world.

Quiet on the inside, quiet on the outside.

When I am in conflict with myself, when I desire riches, or power, when I aim to control, or destroy, I am in conflict. Do you understand? When I see that all is connected, and the pursuit of happiness through the acquisition of land and castles, and jewels is a dangerous illusion; when I am satisfied with the food I eat and the shelter I call my home; when I see that I am my enemy and he is me, that his land is my land, and mine is his, that no woman is a possession, nor has the right to be possessed, then I shall start to come out of the darkness which is conflict, and into the light which is intelligence. Can you see?

Peace and war are still states of conflict. Both must exist if one exists.

When I see that we have no rights on this earth; that rights are a man-made concept just like peace, and are only empty words; when all men and women stop striving and competing; something magical happens. The mind goes quiet. Who cares what happens to the outside world. The inside is the outside.

*Remember the owl and the mouse.
There is no peace. No war. Just relationship.
The mouse is to the owl, as the owl is to the mouse.*

Everything is just as it should be. Now, let's get back to the business of living!

[Back to Index](#)

Play

- 1. Activity by children that is guided more by imagination than by fixed rules*

One thing that guides us all in our adult life is the need to be serious. In our work, our family life, our duties to the country, and to god. Life is one long need to be serious. Now, we have covered fun in another topic, and this isn't about just having fun. This is a way of approaching life, a way of working, a way of letting go of the internal and external controls. The question is, will society let you play when all it wants is for you to conform?

From the beginning of their lives, children are encouraged to play. Whatever they do, from “drawing” with crayons, to splashing about in the water, or just running round in circles, they are encouraged to do, without judgement, without a goal. The activity doesn't have a goal, there are no winners, no losers, and no constraints or rules. It just is.

How far we are from that love of play as we reach puberty. As soon as we hit twelve or thirteen, there is a new word enforced on us. Expectation (*belief about (or mental picture of) the future*). Adults and teachers suddenly want us to *be* something in the world. Every activity must have a purpose. If we go running it should be in a race, and we should race to win. If we study Mathematics, it should be to pass our exams with an A. If we paint, it should be a picture of great beauty. If we play an instrument, we should play it so well we join the school orchestra.

It is not enough to simply do something just as method of expression. From those days on, our inner lives are controlled. Nothing without purpose. Nothing without purpose. Everything must mean something. Every activity **MUST** be perfect. We must control ourselves.

All this does is lead to pent up frustration, so let's try to break down these constraints we place on ourselves. Let's try to do what is not expected of us, something people would be shocked to see us do, and I'm not talking about running around naked in the street. Although you could if you wanted to!

We have spent many thousands of years trying to become “civilised” (*marked by refinement in taste and manners, or having a high state of culture and development both social and technological*). We have quelled the brute inside, we are homo sapiens, the most intelligent species on the planet.

People look down on humans who are not polished; who say the wrong thing; who do not conform to the idea of the civilised society. But civilisation, as I see it, is a facade. It belies the true nature of the human, the true self that is lurking underneath all that refinement. Not that we are crazed animals underneath, just that the true “us” is different from the person we project, the person others expect us to be.

Think about this carefully for a moment, and think back to your childhood (*the state of a child between infancy and adolescence*) if you can. What were people expectations of you back then? Could you do as you please, or were you controlled? Was the most important part of your life play, or was it study? Now think about adolescence. Did your parents' attitude to you change? Did they suddenly start to shout and tell you to do your homework and stop thinking about play?

There is an important point to make here and we must try to distinguish real play from just messing about; you see, in my mind, real play is constructive. Real play isn't sitting in the park drinking beer with your friends instead of doing homework, or hanging around a fast food establishment with your peers, trying to look cool; nor is it going out on your mountain bike in the country. Real play is in your mind. Real play is the way you approach any situation, whether it be work, exercise, or study. Real play is something you find deep inside, not in a sandpit or on an easel drawing.

Of course, your teachers, parents, and employers don't want you to think like that, they need to control your mind! They want you to think a certain way, conform in thought, act a certain way – conform in action. If you didn't, how would they ever get you to perform any tasks they wanted you to do? Admittedly, if you want to be a brain surgeon you will have to learn brain surgery, or if you want to be an engineer you will have to learn engineering.

But I am not talking about specific skills here, as some are necessary for us to know. This is about using your imagination. Just letting your imagination take you on a journey into a game; a game where there are no rules, no competitors, no winners or losers. A game of play you are not even in control of. A game you just let happen.

Just in case you think I'm crazy, think how advertising agencies come up with some of their best campaigns, or the most inventive films or books are written? It certainly isn't through self-control and being civilised! It's through letting the mind go on its own path, if only for a shorttime.

If you are like me mid thirties or older, and have spent the best part of your adult life working in a

controlled environment, or lead a controlled, but civilised life, this next section is for you.

It is only until recently I discovered what a powerful tool play is. It helped me to understand myself more. It helped me realise I was putting a front on everything I was and did. I did and said things I believed people wanted to hear, or because they would be impressed by the knowledge I had. This facade was the two dimensional being that most of us are brought up to become, but that is not who we are.

Sing, sing, sing!

Imagine for a moment sitting and just singing out loud. Right now. How would you feel? Go on try it. I'm not talking about singing a known song, or even something you have made up; unfortunately that requires interaction from the brain, which requires language and thought which interfere with play. No I mean, just making noise from your throat, expressing yourself from deep, deep inside. Go on, try it now. No one's watching you, no one's listening. Be as loud as you like. Get the sounds from places you didn't know existed. Break down the barriers of civilisation! Scream if you like!

Except, sorry, I forgot to tell you, you're on a packed commuter train.

What would people do? How would they react to you? Would they think you were mad? Probably. Would they look at you strangely? Probably. What would they be thinking? "Don't look over at him, he's a crazy man, just ignore him," and you would probably be thinking the same. You see, it doesn't feel comfortable doing something with no control and no order does it?

As humans, we must feel that what we are doing fits in with everything we have been taught. A painter has been taught how to paint, and a musician has been taught how to play his instrument. For them to use their inner play instinct and just make noise or just express whatever comes out of their head onto the canvas wouldn't seem right would it? Except that would discount some of the greatest art of the last century and would certainly have put the brakes on jazz ever being invented.

The greatest intelligence comes out of play. Play makes connections in the brain that we couldn't ever make if we followed the rules. For some things you need rules, but play changes the game.

Do this play exercise with me right now. Grab a piece of paper and a couple of pens. We are going to play. Are you having fun yet? I am! Take a pen in your hand and stare at the paper. Do you notice what is happening in your brain? The same thing happened in mine for the first few times. That is the barrier between the pen and your brain coming in. It is your resistance to just let the pen flow onto the paper.

You may be thinking "*What* will I draw? *Should* I draw a tree? *Should* I draw a line?" or even, "I can't draw." That is always the one I used. So the only way to break this control barrier is to lift the pen right now and touch it on the paper. Do not let it leave the paper until you have finished playing. What did yours look like? Mine was some kind of square with some wiggly circles in the middle and some other stuff!

Did you notice the whole time you were doing the exercise that your brain was trying to interfere by offering you suggestions as to how to control the pen? Was it making judgements about the quality of your drawing, maybe suggesting things like "it isn't good," or "this is a stupid game, I've had enough, I'm going to put this stupid book down. He's gone too far this time, this is rubbish!" I wouldn't be surprised.

Remember: Thought interferes with play
Make a direct connection between the mind and the pen

Let's have one more play exercise. This one requires no skill at all, like the other exercises we have just done. Wherever you are at the moment find something to bang. You know, like a drum! But not like playing the drums, you see playing drums requires control. It requires learning and requires a certain skill. I want you to bang a table or any surface you can – loud as you like. But when you start to bang, notice how your brain is trying to control the rhythm. It will not let you just make noise, the beats must be evenly spaced, there must be conformity; is that happening to you? Let the sounds come, do not control them.

When you have had enough, reflect on the interference that happened between your hand and mind. The intention may have been to bang in a random way, but something was holding you back, wasn't it. What do

you think that something was?

Play in the mind is as close to being mad, or being under five as you will get, or so civilisation would have you believe. Screaming or making sounds that aren't "tuneful," drawing patterns which don't "mean" anything, banging which does not have a beat or a "rhythm," this is what thousands of years of civilisation has tried to control. They would have you believe that after childhood you must learn and conform to what are recognised acceptable patterns of behaviour. That involves singing in a controlled fashion, drawing in a controlled fashion, and playing drums in a controlled fashion.

There is nothing wrong with hearing music that is pleasing to the brain, or looking at art that is pleasing to the eye. But there is also nothing wrong with making discordant sounds, and drawing patterns that don't mean anything. Once the judge and the censor have been removed, these things "just are." The more you invent and do play exercises, the more you will start to relax. The more you will start to enjoy the experience, and what an experience it is! It is direct, with no interference from "civilisation." As with all skills, this one requires great mastery and you must spend at least two hours a day doing it.

Sorry, that's a joke. Play can never be a skill, or it would be called a skill! And how can you master something when the intention is not to master it. Play brings a little bit of joy to everything you do. Ultimately it is not about drawing, singing or banging, but about taking the feeling of play with you in your mind, and applying it to everything you do in life. Mad? Uncivilised? Childish? Good!

[Back to Index](#)

Police

1. *Maintain the security of by carrying out a control*
2. *The force of policemen and officers*

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Do not be afraid. We are here to protect you

My mum used to say to me: “If you've done nothing wrong, you've got nothing to fear from the police,” and that's pretty much the attitude everywhere. The police are seen as protectors of society, and detractors are seen as anti-authority and troublemakers. The sight of a police car, or a policeman in uniform is supposed to make the public feel comfortable, so why do I feel uncomfortable when I see one? Is it that I've done something wrong and I'm afraid I'll get caught, or is it something more than that?

Even though I have been arrested two or three times when I was younger, for what I would call drunken, foolish youth, I have never been in trouble since. Sure I've had a couple of traffic tickets for speeding and parking, but who hasn't?

Every day the police get thousands of calls from people who have been robbed, or beaten, or worse, needing help. The kind of help they need is physical help, someone more powerful than the aggressor. Who better than a force of armed (in most countries except the uk), uniformed officers of the law to sort it out? They are the legal “muscle” in our society. Men and women authorised to control the population using force if they have to.

Some of you may take offence that I have used the word control, but one thing you must remember is that the police are like the army in that they just follow orders. Laws are passed by our representatives in parliament, and the police are paid to enforce them. So whilst today walking on the street may be legal, tomorrow it may not be. Do you understand?

In the past drink driving was not an offence in the uk and neither was not wearing a seatbelt, but no one was stopped. Why? Because it wasn't against the law. A few years ago driving whilst talking on a mobile phone was not against the law, so you wouldn't have been stopped, but now it is. So although all the three things are dangerous to you, or others around you (drink driving, no seatbelt, talking on a mobile phone), you would not have been stopped and charged. It is only once the government pass a new law that the police will stop you. That means the police only act in accordance with the man-made laws.

In some countries it may be a crime to cross the street except at a pedestrian crossing, in others it may not. In some countries it may be a crime to criticise the government, in others it may not. So the police are not looking after the interests of all people on the planet, they are just following orders – however unjust or lacking in compassion they may be.

You may see the police as doing a difficult, but worthwhile job; catching bad people, and dangerous sex offenders and putting them behind bars; but there will always be a bad person and another sex offender to replace the one taken off the streets. They may break up fights in the street at night, but there will always be another just around the corner.

You may think I have a cynical view of the police, but what I am trying to do is explore their true purpose with you, and whether they are a necessary part of modern society.

The job of the police is to uphold the law, nothing more. If it is the law that all women over the age of fifty be imprisoned, they will do it. If it is the law that all dogs be rounded up and killed, they will do it. If it is the law that anyone who has a bald head be arrested, they will do it. If it is the law that people of a different race be rounded up and imprisoned, they will do it. Remember this. Their primary job is not to protect you, it is to the law. If the law involves helping you they will do it. If the law involves imprisoning you, they will do it.

Stop for a moment and think about this carefully. What difference is there between the police forces in africa, asia, the americas or europe? You may think the police are brutal in some countries, and compassionate in others, but they are just following orders – upholding the law. The compassionate police you see in your own country will treat you very differently as soon as you break a law they are employed to uphold!

So what type of person joins the police force? Does the same type of person who becomes a buddhist monk join the police force? Are they filled with love and compassion for humanity and a desire to see peace throughout the world? Possibly, but I doubt it very much. Like most government jobs, the pay is pretty good, so are the perks and the pension, but this one is so much more than just a desk job.

You get dressed for work in the morning, put on your shirt and your jacket, attach your handcuffs to your belt

along side your walkie talkie, your baton slides into place and your gun goes into its holster beside it. How smart you look, as you put on your shiny polished shoes and polish your badge. PC3234. You stand and regard yourself in the mirror, what an important job you have to do today. Upholding the law. To protect and to serve. Saving innocent people from the evil ones. You walk off on your beat, head held high. Look how the people admire you, look how important they all know you are. Suddenly, you see a boy riding his bicycle on the pavement.

“Stop there!” You cry. “Did you know that it is illegal to ride your bike on the pavement, son?”

“No, sir.”

See, he called you sir, how important does that make you feel?

“Well it is illegal, you can be fined. What's your name son?”

“John, john smith.”

“Well john, I'm going to let you off with a warning today, but let that be a lesson to you.”

“Oh thank you sir, sorry sir, I'll never do it again sir.”

The trembling child cycles off, and you walk away, head held high, filled with the knowledge you showed your merciful compassionate side to the young lad. A tourist comes up to you and respectfully asks the directions to some tourist attraction, and you kindly help him. He thanks you graciously as he moves off, and you swell with feeling of pride. What an important job you do.

Suddenly you hear a scream. “He's got my handbag!”

You look over and there's the culprit running away on the other side of the road.

“Stop! Police!” You shout and you give chase, quickly catching him before rugby tackling him to the ground and handcuffing him.

“Thank you so much officer,” the lady says as you return her handbag.

“No problem, just doing my job.”

You fill with pride again. Isn't it so nice to do a job that is so well respected by everybody (except the bad criminals). You finish your shift and return home, tired but happy you have done a worthwhile job serving the law.

So in answer to my question of what type of people join the police force, and before you come up with worthless titles like “law abiding” and “public spirited,” let me add my thoughts.

I would say that the person is someone who enjoys a bit of excitement, likes the control and power aspect of the job, definitely likes the respect he is offered on a daily basis due to threats of arrest, and likes the praise he gets when he catches “bad” people. Am I close?

If you are in the police force what sort of person are you? What do you get out of the job? How far would you go if the law demanded it? Would you kill for a few bits of paper? Oh, I forgot, you do already – for stealing paper, or money, as it is more commonly known. You take another person's life for something that isn't real.

Money is only money because we say it is! Do you understand? We kill people who steal. Because the government can't have everyone running around stealing. We have to make an example of them, and if they don't stop when you shout “STOP! POLICE!” you shoot them! Dead. And think you've done a good job. What gives us the right to take another life just for a bit of paper. Can you answer me that? It's the law. It's the law. It's the law. Like a broken record, that's all I hear from you!

He broke the law and he paid the price.

Just because we view something as wrong is no reason to kill, whatever the “crime.” If we are to become the compassionate world I believe we can be, we must show our compassion to those who need it most, and those people are the ones who have wronged us. By helping them to understand compassion we are helping the rest of the world. No longer will they be a threat to us or anyone else but they can help others find the way.

Sorry, maybe I believe in humanity too much. Maybe it is too much to ask of the supposed most intelligent species on the planet. Just one thing though, I have never been able to understand why other species do not need their own police force! Ah, maybe they're not intelligent enough to need a police force. You see, the more intelligent you are, the more you need to be controlled. Imagine if the lions had other lions patrolling to make sure the rowdy lions don't get out of line!

You see, to me, it doesn't make sense why such an intelligent species needs this amount of controlling, surely we should be able to work out how to live together peacefully in a community without the need for

other humans to stand over us with batons and weapons just daring us to do the wrong thing. Maybe that's just the way it is to be. The price of intelligence is submission to control. Sorry, but that doesn't make sense to me. Does that make sense to you? We should not be controlled by anybody, let alone some stranger in a uniform with a weapon.

Maybe the police force is the conscience we are missing in our lives, but surely if that was the case it would be better to use priests and monks for that job; to help us understand where we could have done better.

I think this is more to do with keeping the rich and powerful safe from us, the common man. The working man. If you have nothing, what does the robber steal? Think about this carefully for a moment. In order to rule, there must be order and for that to happen there must be control and that control must be a deterrent to all who try to go against the system. Does that make any sense to you?

The way the media and the government portrays crime, is as an epidemic. According to them we aren't safe even in our own homes, let alone walking the streets. "The police need more power," they say. So now we have random checks. We are now being asked to carry identification to prove who we are, just in case we are a criminal or a terrorist.

We must have order. Yet there aren't millions of terrorists and criminals out to steal from us or kill us, and even if they did, money is just paper, and my life is just a life. None are permanent, so why are we getting so worried about it all? Why is there now a panic in the governments of the world?

Because as most people know deep down, none of this is for us. It is for the powerful, the influential and the rich. The police force exists to protect them and their interests. This may sound crazy to some of you, but I urge you to think about this carefully. You only have to watch the police at work at any demonstration against government policy to know that even in a democracy, you're not in charge.

In the uk, many thousands of people marched to stop the prime minister taking us into the current war in iraq, but did it make any difference? No. We are the people that the government supposedly represent, but who are they really representing? Themselves and their ideologies and interests? Who are the police force really protecting?

Unfortunately, If you are unlucky enough to be ruled by a military junta, or you are ruled by a lunatic, you may find that the police will arrest you just for breathing the wrong way, but it is interesting to note that when the ruler changes, so does the attitude of the police. A policeman who yesterday beat you up for walking on the wrong side of the street now smiles as you pass him. A policeman who last month arrested you for speaking at a rally against the government now joins in as a member of the crowd.

So why does the most intelligent species on earth need all this protecting? Are we not strong, are we not able to sort our own problems out? Are communities and families (of which all criminals are a part) not able to help the people involved in crime? Why do we have to let a system deal with what is essentially a human problem?

Greed and violence. That's what the police stop.

The way to transcend those two vital things is through awareness of the self in action. When we can go beyond greed and violence, the police force will be no more. There will be no justification for any government control and subduing of the people. The policemen and women of the world will be on the streets looking for another job, and this time they will have to earn respect from the public, not demand it with the threat of arrest. They will have to seek their thrills elsewhere in life and hang up their weapons and handcuffs.

If you want to see a world free of police watching your every move through cctv, and controlling what you do and say then you had better listen up! No matter who you are or what you do the only way forward is to go beyond greed and violence. Understand yourself. Become aware of your greed and your anger which is violence. Learn to love. Live your life in an authentic way and before long the sound of the police siren will be a distant memory, for if there is no crime, surely there is no need for a police force.

Sorry, am I dreaming of a utopian society? I don't think so. But if I were and it isn't possible to live without a police force, wouldn't it be a sad day for the human race that we cannot live peacefully together on this planet we have to share together?

As we close this topic, please remember this. Policemen and women are not people to be looked up to, nor looked down upon, they are merely people who do a job, where they do whatever they are told. They have no minds of their own, so you should feel sorry for them not angry against them. They have no awareness of

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

what is right action and what isn't, they just follow orders.

So next time you are running away from a bank robbery in a country with armed police, and they shout: Stop! Police! I would stop. After all, losing your life over a couple of bits of paper isn't worth it. And your life certainly doesn't mean anything to the officer who shot you. He was just doing his job. Upholding the law.

[Back to Index](#)

Politeness

1. *A courteous manner that respects accepted social usage*
2. *The act of showing regard for others*

It seems to me, that sometime in the last few years we have lost something important in society. People seem to be ruder, more impolite, more aggressive than they used to be. Why do you think that is? I notice a distinct lack of care for everyone else; we seem to be so caught up in our own lives that we have lost the ability to be polite to other people. Getting on and off public transport, in public places, at work, in the pub, in fact everywhere.

It doesn't cost anything to be polite, but somehow it doesn't seem to matter to people. "Manners maketh the man," my mother used to say, which I can't wholeheartedly agree with, but it does help us all get on a bit easier.

It seems that manners and being polite are not built in to nature, in that we are not born with these attributes. These are things we have learned from our parents, from teachers, and from observing others behaviour. So, if they are not inbuilt, why do we need them? Why do we have to be polite just because someone says that it is the acceptable thing to do? Why do we need to give up our seat for a disabled person on the tram, or hold a door for someone? Why should I? But the question I want to ask is, why shouldn't you?

If no one had told you you should be polite, would you be rude or obnoxious? I want to understand this with you. If it is not in my nature to be polite, does that mean that Man as a species is an unthinking uncaring animal only concerned with himself? Well as we can see from life today, that answer would have to be a resounding "yes."

It is only through the will of those who have shaped society that we have learned these social skills. Why else would we be polite when it is not in our nature? Our parents are polite, so we mimic them. Our parents are rude, so we mimic them. When we are growing up, we are influenced by our role models who are our parents, our teachers, and our peers. We don't "know" if being polite is right or wrong, anymore than we know if being impolite is right or wrong. We just learn from those around us. It is only in later life we can see if we conform to the norm. Do you understand?

If everyone else is being obnoxious and rude to everyone in the street and I am being polite, does it make me a better person than they are? No of course not, it just means that I am not conforming to the behaviour of the majority. It is neither right or wrong.

If I understand what it is to have compassion, love and empathy for my fellow man, do I not treat him differently? Am I not courteous, not because I have learned to be, but merely because I want to help my fellow man, because he is my brother?

All of this may seem like a load of old nonsense to some of you who might be saying "some people are polite, some people are rude, that's just the way it is, accept it." But all I accept is that if it is not in my biological nature, because "politeness" is a man-made concept, then we have to start looking deep inside our minds. We have to start to become aware of ourselves in relationship with others, because politeness cannot exist in isolation. It only comes into being when I am in relationship with another.

It's like a dance

I guess many hundreds of years ago (when there was a fraction of the number of people on the planet that there are now), we didn't have this problem. We were surrounded by family and kinship groups, we had love for them and we treated them accordingly. We would not have needed any formal method of dealing with them. That is not to say we didn't argue or fight with them but that is not of concern to us here.

As time went on, the population increased dramatically, and with the rise of agriculture, cities were born, where all of a sudden we were thrown together with many thousands of people we did not know. That process has continued until now we have up to twenty million people living in one city. That is an awful lot of people to get to know!

So now we are surrounded by strangers, and we need some way to interact with them to show we are friendly, and not aggressive, so we invent a way of behaving that shows them some regard. Politeness is born. By creating a way of behaving that is always friendly to people, we reduce the chance of conflict, which is highly likely in cities bursting with people!

"What are you looking at!"

“Nothing, I'm sorry.”

“Good!”

If we didn't know how to show people some positive regard (even if it is false) so they don't take offence can you imagine the misunderstandings and conflict that would be going on! I am polite to you, you are polite to me, I am polite to her, she is polite to me.

“I like your dress it is very nice” (actually I hate it, it's awful). “Oh that dinner was lovely” (it was the worst thing I've ever tasted). And we extend it to friends as well. “Your house is lovely” (who did they get to decorate it, a blind man).

But we keep on being polite, afraid to offend anyone with our comments, so in a way we lie. We do not offer our true selves, and we cover it up with some clever language and learned behaviour. It is false, but it saves us from trouble! So we dance around each other. I take one step, you take two steps, back step, front step, being careful not to tread on each others toes!

So we have two types of politeness. We have verbal, and we have physical action, but as we have seen, it is merely a social tool which we use to cover our authentic selves. That is not to say that some people really do mean it.

“But I do like it.”

“Come on, you're just being polite.”

“No, really, I do.”

Unfortunately, we have got ourselves in a bit of a tangle with all this politeness stuff because now we don't really know who means it, and who's just acting polite so as not to cause offence! Of course, some people aren't polite at all, and we take offence to this. We blame the mother, and we blame a lack of education, but it's not that they are rude (*lacking civility or good manners*) they just haven't learned the dance steps. They are, unfortunately much closer to displaying their authentic selves than those of us engaged in the dance. When they don't like something or someone they show it, when they are angry they show it, often in public. Those of us engaged in the dance are horrified. We want something done about this lack of courtesy.

“Excuse me young man, could I possibly have a seat, I have a very painful back.”

“Fuck off granddad.”

“Charming! What a rude young man, someone should teach you some manners.”

“Yeah, whatever.”

Many people have been saying that people are getting ruder and less thoughtful than they used to be, but maybe the dance isn't being taught as much anymore. You see, the new dance is a solo affair and it is being encouraged all the time by those in power. We are told that thinking about “me” is good. My money, my things, my life. We are too busy to worry about other people. So what if I cause offence? “Fuck you.” I won't see you again, there are way too many people in the city for that.

And that's just it, isn't it? In the old days, when we lived in small tribal groups we would see people all the time. We couldn't walk around anonymously as we do now. These were people we would see every day, so being rude to them and getting away with it wasn't an option.

It's a shame, but I thought when I started this discussion with you, that we would find out after all, that politeness was in some way inherent in our nature as humans, but I see now that it's all just a cover – a way of showing others in society you are engaged in the same dance they are. We are not like it at all. It is not in my nature to hold a door open for an old lady, but something I have learned to do in order to be accepted by the majority. Unless...

I have observed myself. I understand I am always in relationship with others. I have awareness. I understand I am not an individual but part of the whole. I understand I am as much part of my neighbour as he is of me. I do not need to cover up. I do not need to lie. I am compassionate towards him. I love him as a brother. Why would I not help him if he needed it? I understand I do not need to learn how to behave from others, just to understand my relationship to all things.

When I understand the connection, we no longer have need for clever social tools. Let me ask you one final question, why would I not help my brother? Why would I be unkind to my brother, or hurt him with my words? After all, he is my brother.

[Back to Index](#)

Politics

1. *Social relations involving authority or power*
2. *The profession devoted to governing and to political affairs*

I was surprised when I read the primary dictionary definition of politician and found it to be something so innocuous as “*a leader engaged in civil administration*,” so I looked in a different dictionary, and found that the definition of politician was also innocuous. “*A person active in party politics*.” “This can't be right,” I thought, so I looked at another definition. “*A schemer who tries to gain advantage in an organization in sly or underhanded ways*.” Ah ha! That's more like it. So with a better definition to hand, let us begin our discussion.

I don't know about you, but wherever I have worked, there has been a certain amount of “office politics” going on, with people “jockeying for position,” attempting to manipulate and undermine to gain some position or curry favour (*seek favour by fawning or flattery*) with their superiors. People gossip and badmouth others for no other reason than their own personal ambition. Although it can be destructive in an office, the poison normally only spreads as far as the company walls. The opposite can be said to be happening in the political world. The maliciousness spreads, not only across parties, but across borders too.

Politics has always been said to be a “serious” game, and it needs “serious” players. But all politics seems to be is like any other game where the object is winning, except the players employ more devious tactics and underhand moves than can ever be seen in a game of cards. But the objective is the same. Winning.

The business of politics has nothing to do with ensuring the well-being and happiness of all on the planet, but is actually an end unto itself. Do you follow? What we are saying is that the objective of politics is just politics, where the participants are engaged in a continual tug of war (*any hard struggle between equally matched groups*). Sometimes one team wins, sometimes the other team wins. And they continue to struggle. Day in, day out. Year after year. Decade after decade. Century after century. And what gets done? Politics.

Some of you may be thinking: “What's he talking about? If it hadn't been for politics, the slavery act wouldn't have been repealed, or the capital punishment act, or the immigration act wouldn't have been passed, or the health and safety at work act...” But what I am trying to convey to you is that whether the result is positive or negative for society, it is just politics.

For people who are supposed to be engaged in real life decisions, they seem very removed from it all. They parade around, making powerful speeches, and introducing bills on behalf of their constituents. One day they fight for the little man's working rights, the next they sign a bill allowing companies to fire their employees more easily, because the sponsor of that bill has agreed to support their bill on the environment! Do you see? Politics is no more than a delicate dance where you get what you want by giving up something else, and agreeing with one man to undermine another etc. there is no end goal.

“You're not being fair, leave us alone,” cry the politicians. “We do our best, it's a very difficult job!” and indeed it is when everything is tied up in the dance. It is a miracle that anything gets done with the amount of back stabbing and political infighting that goes on. But to be fair, things do happen – just very, very slowly.

I'm sure when most people enter politics they do not imagine it will be like this. I'm sure when they register their candidacy, they really do want to help make people's lives better, but as soon as they are elected, they find out that the real business of politics is much more than just making peoples lives better. It's about developing relationships, flattery, biding your time, aligning yourself with the right people, and you realise, that to make people's lives better, you should have worked for a charity developing clean water supplies in africa. But then again, you'd be back into office politics.

“Alan, my boy,” says the political old timer, “you've got a lot to learn here. I know you just want to do good, but I've been here a long time, and if you want to get anything done, you have to get to know the right people.”

“I see,” I added nervously.

“See old smithy over there, he came into politics to save the world, but because of the company he keeps, he'll be lucky to save his job, come the next election,” he chuckled. “I used to be just like you, so full of big ideas, so full of anger at the injustice going on in the world, but the longer I was in politics, the more I realised, that if I wanted to change anything, I was going to have to keep my job, do you understand?”

“I think so,” I said, looking a little more confused than maybe I ought to have been.

“Let me put it this way. Hang on to your job first, go along with a few things you don't particularly like and vote for them, after all, it's no skin off your nose, is it? Just an X in the box and you're done, and by helping other people pass their bills you can then call upon them to help you pass your bills,” he added with

all the wisdom of a sage.

“So let me get this right. You are saying that even if I think it is unforgivable what the logging companies are doing to the ancient forests, I should support the government bill which gives the loggers even more rights to log ancient forests, and in return they will support a bill that protects some of the trees in a new national park?” I asked.

“You've got it!” he replied with a smile.

“This business is complete lunacy!”

“You're learning my boy.”

So why do we keep a system like this going?

Because those in power quite like it, thank you. It allows them to make magnanimous (*noble and generous in spirit*) gestures that make them feel like (a) they are very important, and (b) they are really helping the world, instead of either making it worse, or just talking. And boy do they love to talk! The thing is, they make it sound good, but most of it is pure waffle.

“Would my right honourable friend agree that by allowing the greenbelt (*a belt of parks or rural land surrounding a town or city*) land to be used for a new superstore, he is allowing the destruction of yet another area of natural beauty that is famed for its wildlife?”

“I would like to thank my right honourable friend for his question and ask him whether he cares more for a few ducks than for the future prosperity of this country and its citizens (much laughter in the house). Can a duck feed a man and his family? Of course it can't. But the new employment that the retail park will bring will be able to feed a thousand men and their families, and I would like to assure my right honourable friend that his ducks will be moved to a new park a few miles up the road, all paid for by the new retail park owners. Is my right honourable friend still concerned, or have I answered the question?”

A sensible human being would say: “But hang on, you haven't answered my real question, which is why yet another piece of unspoilt land is being built on, just so that people can go out and do more shopping,” but the cunning politician knows that it is better to accept a small concession (which after all, is a win) than to accept defeat. Defeat means he may not be elected next time round.

As we said earlier, he is engaged in a dance with complex steps, and he must ensure that he retains his balance! So, rather than going back to his constituents empty-handed, he can at least take something back to them, thereby (temporarily) placating those who were opposed to the development.

Back in his home constituency at the town hall meeting the politician stands up to speak:

“Now quieten down everyone. I am here to report some good news – a veritable success in fact (to which the small crowd applaud). Our valued wildlife, which is currently precariously close to the dangerous m5 motorway is to be given a new sanctuary where they will be safe from harm. A new lake is to be built and new viewing platforms created so we can observe them whilst not disturbing them.”

Suddenly a constituent stands up: “But what about the retail development? Is it still going ahead?”

“I would have thought that you would be pleased about the new wildlife park,” the politician scolds.

“Not if it means more of our green spaces are taken away from us!” the constituent replies.

“I'm sorry, I have run out of time, we can pick this up at the next meeting,” says the politician as he beats a hasty retreat away from his little constituency, back to the safety of parliament, where he feels much more at home.

“How did the constituency meeting go?” asks one of his colleagues.

“Well, I would have thought they would have shown a little more gratitude for the concessions I got for them,” replies the young politician.

“These people just don't know what's good for them,” jokes his colleague, “shall we retire to the bar?”

“Why not? It's been a very stressful day.”

Well what can you do, that's politics for you! You win some, you lose some, but as long as you keep your job, you live to fight another battle. And at the end of the day, that's all it is, a job. The people engaged in politics are not more intelligent or better people than us, nor do they know what's best for you or for the country. They just get paid to play a game. Unfortunately, the results of their games played in the political arena affect the rest of us, and the planet as a whole. They only care about winning the game, whatever they

say.

We have no need for people who just talk, we need people like you to stand up and take action, not wait for somebody to get a concession for us. Stand up and be counted. It is time to *act* before those in power end up destroying everything that is on this wonderful planet, including us! What do you say? Will you stand?

[Back to Index](#)

Pornography

1. *Creative activity (writing or pictures or films etc.) of no literary or artistic value other than to stimulate sexual desire*

If you're a man, you may have looked at pornography at some time in your life (apparently women sometimes look at it too). I'm not going to lie to you and say that I find it disgusting or that I've never looked at it. I have. Most men use pornography as a means to achieve orgasm through masturbation (*manual stimulation of the genital organs of yourself or another for sexual pleasure*), nothing more. They will not become violent rapists, murderers, or devalue women because of it. They will not love their partners or wives any less either. So why do it?

Let's start our discussion with me admitting to you the reader that I have watched pornographic films, looked at still images, surfed for various types of pornography on the internet and even gone to peep shows and lap dancing bars. Does that make me a pervert (*a person whose behaviour deviates from what is acceptable especially in sexual behaviour*)? And while we're on the subject, I have even been to a prostitute (*a woman who engages in sexual intercourse for money*).

Do I disgust you? Does the very mention of what I have done make you want to put this book down now? If so, why? Is it because you have been told that it is sinful? Is it against everything in your religion, or your morals, or values, or whatever else you like to call it? For me, looking at images of the opposite sex is stimulating. Like most men, I have a high sex drive, although that doesn't mean I want to have sex every moment of the day. I have been celibate now for over one year. That was a personal choice.

So, do I feel ashamed of what I have done, or do I feel guilty? I used to. But I have come to accept that what I did was not wrong, that is purely for others to judge. All that it did was draw me further away from love. Looking at two dimensional images of women showing their vaginas in various poses or showing them having sex in various positions is nothing more than voyeurism (*a perversion in which a person receives sexual gratification from seeing the genitalia of others or witnessing others' sexual behaviour*), although that voyeurism becomes (like all things that act on the pleasure centres of the brain) an addiction. The more you see, the more you want.

We used to have to go into the shop and hide the "top shelf" magazines in amongst economics weekly and a copy of gardeners monthly as we left. Although we were old enough to buy the magazine, we felt like cheeky schoolboys ashamed of what they were doing.

The internet has changed all that. You can anonymously sign up for sites using your credit cards, and not satisfied with seeing naked bodies, or a couple engaged in intercourse, we crave more. We (the brain that is) are bored with these images. It now takes more and more graphic images to enable us to achieve orgasm.

I don't know if you have recently seen what is out there on the net, but you can find images of (mostly) women engaged in graphic sex with animals, videos of women swallowing the sperm of tens of a men at a time, people engaged in "pissing" (urinating on, or in the mouth of someone) and "fisting" (inserting the whole hand into the vagina or anus). People even engage in faeces eating.

Although some of the images are unpleasant, I don't find it shocking that people pay to see these images, what I find amazing is that people actually allow themselves to be filmed!

As the majority of the viewers are men, it makes sense that most of the "models" in the videos are women. So why do women get involved with such things? It isn't a small number either.

All around the world, women are allowing men to piss on them, fist them, perform anal sex on them, stick their penises in every orifice, debase them and brutalise them. Why? Are the women involved held prisoner? Are they off their heads on drugs given to them by these men? Drunk? Or are they doing it for money? Or do they simply enjoy the fun of sex. Are they happy to get involved because they like the excitement?

I know most young men's dream is to star in their very own pornographic video. Young men like to talk about sex a lot, and they like to do it even more. It is like a coming of age. Sex for men is the most natural thing in the world. Just like the bull in the field that tries to "service" every cow, young men would like to "service" every female in the world! When it comes to sex, young males aren't too fussy who they choose. They may fantasise about having sex with an attractive model, but are happy to put up with anything they can get.

Men like sex. Lots of it. It is in their inherent nature to wish to procreate, to spread their genes far and wide. Whichever way you look at it and however you try to control it with morals and family values, it is a natural process that neither you nor I will ever stop, nor would I want to.

But what about young women? They become fertile in their teens, and are ready to procreate. It is only

natural for them to want to have sex as well. But women aren't so desperate to have sex with every man they meet. Women are programmed to find the best choice of mate. Someone who is strong enough to look after her and has good genes. These are basic biological facts.

Men and women are programmed for sex. So doesn't it make sense that some women just like lots of sex the way men do, and they like to fantasise about men doing different things with them? And isn't it a natural process to want to act out these fantasies? For some maybe, for others fantasy shall remain in the realm of the mind. So although I do believe that some women are forced to do these things on camera, I believe that there is a large proportion that enjoy the exhibitionism it allows. Extroverts, exhibitionists, sex addicts, and people who just want to try it once for the experience.

I don't think we should demonise the people involved. Whoever they are, they are human beings, and unless coerced with threats of physical violence or done through desperation due to drug addiction, they have the ability to say no. "No, I don't want to do this."

Did you know that pornography is still the most popular thing to look at on the internet! More people browse for porn than any other topic! That reminds me of my time in information technology, when we would monitor the internet usage of employees. I was utterly astounded at (a) the number of people looking at pornographic images and videos, and (b) who the people were that were doing it. People in high positions like managers and senior executives.

I had to laugh. These were people who were putting themselves above all of us. These were people who espoused values and morals. "Ha! Got you!" I thought; and I took great pleasure in informing them that due to company policy (which they probably wrote) they were to cease looking at pornography at work!

A long while later, I started to reflect on this situation, where people who held high office such as politicians or members of the clergy, people who dictated the values and morals of the country, were being exposed for the use of pornography, sex abuse, and involvement in prostitution. People who talked about family values, but did the opposite in real life.

I realised at that time that values (*beliefs of a person or social group in which they have an emotional investment (either for or against something)*) and morals (*motivation based on ideas of right and wrong*) didn't actually mean very much. Here were people who were telling us all how to live our lives, and not following the advice they were giving! These values they were talking about were idealised concepts of how they would like to live, but were too fallible themselves to adhere to them.

Again and again we hear stories in the popular press about how the "mighty have fallen," and deep down, I guess it gives us some satisfaction to know we aren't evil or bad for doing it too. I have a word of advice for anyone who wants to enforce some idealistic value or moral system on others. Don't. If you want to adhere to something that's fine, but do us all a favour before you stand up and preach – keep it to yourself.

Prostitution

1. *Offering sexual intercourse for pay*

On reflection, perhaps paying for sex in a drunken moment whilst out with the lads is worse. I didn't consider this at the time, but performing the actual sex act with someone you do not care for, have no love for, and who is probably in a deeply troubled state due to alcohol, drug addiction, or physical and emotional abuse makes you think. Why did I want to pay someone for sex?

It wasn't that I couldn't make love to my girlfriend, it was the excitement brought on by alcohol, and the cheers of drunken friends after a night out after work. There was no thought for the feelings of the girl who offered one small part of her body to me for a fleeting moment and £30. No empathy. No love. No compassion. Prostitution cuts through all of those things with a sharp knife. The knife of money. The knife of power and control.

I didn't think I was doing any of those things, I just saw it as a drunken opportunity to have fun. And it was exciting. I had never ever thought of doing anything like this before, but like lots of people, I'm easily led (not that it excuses action). I didn't even enjoy it. I think I was nervous and embarrassed. I certainly didn't feel powerful or dominant. In fact I think it was the other way round. The woman I had sex with was a professional. There was no small talk or messing around.

“Right, £30 quid before you start. No kissing on the mouth. Twenty minutes max!”

This was not how I had imagined it at all. In fact I had no idea of how it would feel. She gave me the condom to put on and I rolled it back to cover my penis. I then inserted it into her vagina and gave a few half-hearted in-out movements. I ejaculated. I put the condom in the bin, got dressed and left. I can't even remember if I said goodbye.

All that trepidation and excitement before the act, and then after ejaculation, nothing but emptiness. No love, no cuddling, no holding, no facing your partner and whispering into their ear or looking into their eyes. Just a physical act and a financial transaction.

As with all potentially addictive behaviour, I went back several times when I was drunk. It seemed a regular thing to do. Except this time I wasn't with my friends.

I started going to lap dancing bars first, ogling naked women dancing on poles. During the course of the evening I would start by giving pole dancers a tip as they were dancing, then progress to the private rooms where they would rub their breasts over me getting me really excited. I would then move on to a brothel, or just pick up someone on the streets and get oral sex, or even full sex in a dark alley somewhere.

The addiction was beginning to take root in my brain. Suddenly, I realised I was actually addicted. I no longer just went out for a drink with my friends. After they went home or on to a nightclub, I would jump in a cab and go out to the red light areas.

I never did this sober. Whether or not this was a way of mitigating what I was doing or because sex and alcohol together felt doubly good, I will never know. I do know that the brain likes pleasure. As much pleasure as it can get. Mine was no exception. This only lasted six months or so, until I think I either ran out of money or got bored. I think it was the latter.

It was only recently, when I reflected on these events, that I started to consider them from the woman's side.

How did she feel standing on the street corner, waiting to pick up a man, any man who was willing to give her a few pounds to invade her body. To perform an act of love, minus the love. How did she feel when I entered her? Was she disgusted with me? How could she stand my alcohol soaked breath? The stench of alcohol oozing out of my pores, the smell of tobacco covering my clothes, and my heavy body lying on top of hers, fully clothed, save for the zip undone and her skirt lifted up. What must she think of me, and more importantly what must she think of herself? What is going on in her mind? Is it tormented by abuse and drug addiction as I suspect, or is she full of joy and love, and merely enjoys sex?

Although I believed the causes of women to get involved in pornography as varied, and believed that yes, they could be doing it because they enjoyed the thrill of having sex on camera, I could not believe it of the women who worked in the brothels or walked the streets.

Several months later, on my way home from work in the city, I saw the same woman I had sex with; it caught me by complete surprise. I was with a work colleague, and suddenly I was in complete shock. I couldn't speak, I just hoped that this woman wouldn't recognise me. Her clothes looked poor, she was thin, her eyes sunken and tired. Her hair was held in place by a can of hairspray and her lipstick looked casually applied. As I'd hoped, she didn't recognise me.

I felt strange as I passed this woman, feeling myself almost looking down on her! Yet months earlier I had been inside her. I had my erect penis between her legs, and I ejaculated inside her. How could I possibly be judging her now? I didn't want to, but I was. In my mind there was nothing the two of us had in common.

I tried to imagine introducing her to my friends, this bedraggled woman with so many problems, probably addicted to drugs, dressed for quick sex. How could I introduce her? I would feel so much shame that I even knew someone like this. What would my parents think? What would my friends think, or my colleagues?

But we did have something in common, we shared a bond. She wanted money and I wanted sex. She was prepared to offer me her body for money and I was prepared to pay for it.

It only came to me recently that the only person I was thinking about in that situation, was myself. I didn't care anything for her. All I cared for was what people would think of me. I was happy to pay her for sex at the time, but to get found out would be disastrous. I saw her as no more than a worthless piece of trash. And I had treated her with utter contempt.

They say that prostitution is the oldest profession in the book, but the more I study the people who sell themselves, the more sadness I feel for the people involved. These are people who for one reason or another, from childhood abuse to drug abuse, turn to selling their bodies. Bodies that should be held in love. Bodies

that give birth to life.

More often than not, violence accompanies this “profession.” Desperate people are often accompanied by violent exploitative men. The two go hand in hand. These women sometimes end up raped and murdered. Not only are these women desperate, and have probably led unhappy lives, now they have someone (a pimp) who wants them to go out to sell their bodies for a major share of the money! How can people do this? How can life get so bad that this is where you end up?

Despised by men and women as the lowest of human beings, but discreetly embraced by men who want to satisfy their sexual urges.

They say that while there are men, there will always be prostitutes, but they also say that not all women are trapped in desperation, but see themselves as the ones wielding the power. The power to open themselves up to men – for a price. These women say they are making a lot of money, that is all, and that no one is exploiting them...

But let's move away from the word exploit and return to the word compassion. How can compassion flourish when the most important act between men and women, the one that is love, has been reduced to a financial transaction? How can we have empathy with others when we use the feminine form for no more than a receptacle for semen? How can there be love without a kiss?

Shhh! It's a secret

As men, we must start to understand ourselves and our sexual urges. We believe ourselves to be civilised, and we have morals and values, but when given the chance, and when nobody's looking, we can't help ourselves. We secretly buy magazines to masturbate to; we secretly use our credit cards to join sex sites on the internet; we secretly watch dvd's when our wives and girlfriends are out; we secretly pay women for sex, or secretly go to places to watch women gyrate up and down poles.

I think we should all take a vow of celibacy until such time as we understand our own minds and how the sexual urges can be understood. We need to understand that being a human male carries responsibility. We cannot expect to be the most intelligent beings on the planet if we give in to our sexual urges as quickly as a dog or the bull in the field.

Just because you see an attractive woman does *not* mean you have to have sex with her; just because you are thinking about sex does not mean you have to instantly masturbate.

We are wired to have sex, but we need to concentrate on developing our key skills in relation to it. Love, empathy and compassion. Could you ever say you experienced all three when having sex? I will not have sex with another woman unless I feel those things.

I have felt both sides of the sexual experience; the emptiness of sex with a stranger, and the fulfilment of making love to a partner. So men, please stop for a moment before you masturbate to pornography again, or go down to the local brothel, or pick up a woman on the street, and ask yourself one question “Am I compassion, or am I violence?” The answer will dictate your action.

[Back to Index](#)

Power

1. Possession of controlling influence

“The development of power”
My story
by Mr A. Powerful Man

I never knew I was going to be so powerful! I had no plans or designs on power – it just kind of happened. I grew up in what you might call a lower middle class family. My father was a carpenter, and my mother looked after my sister and I, and the house which we owned – well, the bank owned most of it.

We never had a lot of money, but I wouldn't say we were uncomfortable. There was always plenty to eat, and although my parents couldn't afford much, they always made sure I had new shoes and clothes.

I didn't like school that much, but my dad said that if I didn't stick in, then I would always be struggling for money like he was, so I passed my exams and went to university. I studied business and finance for three years, and when I finished my degree, I set my heart on one day owning my own company. But first I had to learn the ropes!

I always liked the building trade, and I got a job in a local construction firm my dad knew, as an assistant in the finance office. I learned as much as I could about the job, stuck in and was always working when the rest of the office staff went home. My boss liked me and said that if I committed myself to the job, I was going to quickly progress through the ranks. I liked the sound of that!

So, in my spare time, I studied more and more, and as each year passed I found myself being promoted higher and higher. I was now running the finance department, and was responsible for a large budget and a small team of people, but as it was just a subsidiary of a larger company I didn't have anywhere else to go. My boss suggested I try to get a job in head office and that he would give me an excellent reference although he'd be sorry to see me go.

After about a year, and several interviews, I got the job. I was now finance manager for the group. I had a multi-million pound budget I controlled, and a large team of people beneath me.

I didn't consider myself a powerful man, I wasn't, I was just doing my job – although I was starting to enjoy the perks that came with a more responsible position. I had a company expense account, car, and business class travel, and I enjoyed going to meet the people who worked for me at the local offices. I liked the way I was always shown respect. I was starting to feel as if I was getting somewhere in life. My dad would be very proud.

As time went on, I started to feel as if I was stagnating; the job wasn't exciting anymore. I decided to leave, and although the company tried to persuade me to stay with offers of more responsibility and more salary, I took a job that was to change my life, although I didn't know it yet. I would still be working in construction, but now I would be a financial director!

I was on the board. I was making decisions that could affect the lives of others. When we needed to cut back, we made people redundant, and when business was booming, we hired.

I was in charge of millions of dollars, and it felt good. I had a large team of people in my finance division, and I liked holding meetings with them in my large office on the top floor. I listened to them with great interest, then I would discuss other strategies with them, but the greatest thing was, I made the ultimate decisions, except when I had to discuss things with the management board and get their approval. But that was ok, I was on top. If only my dad could see me now.

The money was rolling in. I had got married, and we had two beautiful children. We still had the “modest” house we had bought several years before when I was just a finance manager, but now I thought the time had come when I moved up in the world and showed people how successful I was. The price stretched my budget a little, but it was worth it. A beautiful eighteenth century house in the country, with several acres of land. We bought the girls a pony each and we bought ourselves a couple of black labradors!

It was all beginning to fit into place. The job, the money, the family, the status. I felt pretty good about it all.

As the years rolled on, I began to wonder how far I could go with this company. It was all very well being a finance director, but it wasn't like running the business. For that, you needed to be even higher. By a stroke of good fortune, three months later the managing director handed in his notice, and I eagerly applied for the job. He had to work out a year's contract, but then I was handed the job.

On my first day I felt like the king of the world. One of the board members welcomed me as their new managing director and the small team applauded me. Applause, for me? Why? But I thought no more about it. I just relished the moment. Now at just 50 years old, I was at the top. I had a staff of three thousand beneath me. Imagine that!

My father said to me: “There's an old saying son, with power comes great responsibility.”

“I know dad. Do you not think I'm responsible?” I replied. “I have three thousand people working for me, they wouldn't give the job to someone who wasn't responsible!”

But my first taste of real power was just something really trivial. You see, an old friend from university I had always kept in touch with throughout my business career had a son who had just finished at university, and was looking for a job, and he was after a personal favour.

“If there's anything that you could do to help, I'd really appreciate it”

“Sure,” I replied, confidently sitting back in my chair. “I'm sure we can find something for the young lad here, I'll make a couple of calls and I'll get back to you.”

“Thanks, I really appreciate it!”

“No problem.”

So I called someone I knew from one of the subsidiaries. “Hi john. Look, I've got a bright young university graduate that's looking for a job, have you got anything going at the moment?”

“I'll keep my eyes open,” he replied.

“Thanks, you'd be doing me a real personal favour.”

As I replaced the handset onto the receiver and I sat back for a moment. At that moment I knew I had made it. I could ask for favours and people would try to help me out. I could never have made this happen if I was still a junior assistant back in the finance office. No one would have listened to me, but now, now I can make things happen! People do what I want them to do.

Several months later we had some problems on a large new city development we were attempting to build. There was some opposition to having more skyscrapers built in the area by the environmental lot, and our building permit was taking too much time to come through. It was costing us serious money being delayed. The land had already been purchased, the machinery was in place, and the personnel were being paid. Something needed to be done. So I called up a friend of mine who worked as a city councillor.

“Joe, we've got a real problem here. You guys are costing us a lot of money with all these hold ups.”

“I'm sorry,” he replied, “once the environmental lot get on the case, everything comes to a standstill, there's nothing I can do. I'd like to help, but my hands are tied.”

“But you and the other councillors still decide what goes through and what doesn't, right?”

“That's true, but some of the councillors agree with the green lot.”

“Well, if you could 'use your influence,' there'd be something in it for you. They listen to you, they respect you, see what you can do to convince them.”

“I'll see what I can do” he replied, “but I can't guarantee I can help.”

“Just see what you can do, I won't forget this.”

Several weeks later, I got a call.

“Hi, it's joe, it looks like everything is going to come through, but I had to call in a favour from an old friend of mine at the environmental and planning authority, he's agreed to speak favourably on your behalf.”

“Joe, you're a great friend. I won't forget this. Oh, how is the new car?”

“Drives like a dream, drives like a dream,” he replied, and the conversation ended.

How was I, the son of a carpenter able to get this planning permit passed? Because, as I now realised, I had power; I could influence people.

This was not just about being at the top in business, this was much more than that. This was pure power. “With power comes great responsibility” I heard my father's voice echo in my head. And I was being responsible. I needed to get those apartments finished and sold so my workers and suppliers could get paid. So I did what anyone would, I used my influence. After all, what's the point of having influence if you don't use it?

After that, we had no more problems with building permits. If someone came up against us, we would just use our contacts to lean on them a bit. And if that didn't work, we'd put them on the payroll – as consultants you understand. These were great times. There was plenty of money for everybody, and business was booming. There was nothing that could stop our business expanding wherever we wanted it to. We just made a few calls and got someone to do us a “personal favour” and we were in business. And that's all it was. Business. I didn't think I was doing anything wrong. I needed something done, so I just asked a friend to help me out. After all, that's what friends do.

All was perfect for several years, until a new government came into power, and that's where it all started

to go wrong.

Without my knowledge, there had been a government task force set up on corruption in the construction industry. Corrupt? Me? I was an important leader in the business community. I was providing thousands of jobs for my employees and my suppliers. I was creating new homes and offices for thousands of people. How could they charge me with corruption (*lack of integrity or honesty (especially susceptibility to bribery); use of a position of trust for dishonest gain*) I had done nothing wrong. All I was doing, was making sure the shareholders got their dividends on time, and people got paid. I was shocked.

I was sacked from my job, and found myself in court. How could they try me for just doing my job? I was fined several thousand pounds and sentenced to eighteen months in jail as a warning to others who tried to bribe officials. My status was gone. My “friends” deserted me. My family was embarrassed by the whole affair, and had to move house because they couldn't stand the shame I had brought on them.

But I was still in denial. I was angry I had been found guilty of what I thought was all just part of the game once you were in power. I ask you for a “favour” and give you a little bonus for helping me, you ask someone else for a “favour” and so on. But during my time in prison, I started to reflect. First, on how I could become successful and powerful again, but later on how much I had been affected by power.

I realised that power is like a silent poison creeping into our veins, until it has corrupted all that we are. I didn't even realise it was affecting me, and although I came to the conclusion I wanted none of it anymore, there was a small voice in the back of my mind, reminding me of all the good times we had when we were in power.

But as I became more aware of how it had corrupted me, I began to see that it was an entity on its own, feeding on my desires, and offering solutions on how to fulfil them, manipulating me and manipulating others to get what it wanted (which was what I wanted). I wanted to control, to dominate, to get respect. I realise now it was all in the mind.

Sitting in a small prison cell changes you. As you sit in the same clothes every day, eating slop, and mixing with people who have murdered, beaten or stolen from the elderly, you realise you were missing out on real life. All the boardroom was, was a place to exercise your ego. But it wasn't reality. I wanted to dedicate my life to helping other people, and decided that when I got out, I would go into politics!

The end

I hope you enjoyed the story! As you can see, power is something that people with ambition are always susceptible to. But when we remove the ambition, there is nowhere left for power to accumulate. The man who is content with his life will never seek power, because he is not trying to gain anything. But are we really content? Are we happy with the life we have and all that we are, or do we want more? When we finally become aware that wanting more is just psychological desire, it will fall away, but until that time, we must be vigilant.

I cannot resist telling you one more story I read in a newspaper whilst travelling in Asia. It went something like this:

Today, the minister for agriculture was arrested on suspicion of corruption. It appears he was using the government's agricultural program of giving free cows to poor farmers for his own and others benefit. He bought the cows from a business his sister owned and paid her an already inflated price of 300 for each cow. He then got his sister to invoice the government 500 for each cow, pocketed the difference and then gave away the cows to his friends.

Unbelievable, but true!

Watch your mind. Watch where it grasps for power. And never go into politics!

[Back to Index](#)

Pride

1. *A feeling of self-respect and personal worth*
2. *Satisfaction with your (or another's) achievements*
3. *The trait of being spurred on by a dislike of falling below your standards*
4. *Unreasonable and inordinate self-esteem (personified as one of the deadly sins)*

There's an old saying that goes something like “pride comes before a fall,” one that my mother used to quote on regular occasions; but sayings aside, it does seem that the more you love yourself, and value your own achievements, above all others, the more precarious your position becomes.

Imagine, for a moment, that we all have our positions on the steps of pyramids. If we fall off the first step it won't hurt a bit, but the further we climb the narrower the steps become, until finally you have reached the apex of your life; but you are balancing on a small point. It doesn't take a genius to work out that if even a small gust of wind comes, you will fall, and when you hit the “bottom” that is seriously going to hurt!

Well, it's the same with how much you value yourself. If you think you are ok, and life is ok, and something bad happens to you, like losing your job, or the respect of others, well, you haven't lost very much. But if you think you are the greatest thing on earth, and suddenly find out that actually you're not, or someone pushes you from that position, the resulting fall from grace is enough to send you spiralling into deep depression.

I often wondered if I had an unhealthy love of self, and I even bought a book on narcissism to see if I conformed to their definition. I did! “What? Me, a narcissist? Never!” I thought. I might like looking at myself in the mirror, but that's just to check I don't have jam on my face, or shaving cream in my ear (wasn't it?).

Narcissism

1. *An exceptional interest in and admiration for yourself*

So I tried to understand what it was to be a narcissist, just in case! I agreed that perhaps I did sometimes take an “exceptional interest” in myself, but if I didn't, then who would. The book went on to explain that narcissists think they are very important, and asked questions such as: “Do you feel as if you have something very important to say to everyone,” or “do you have a special plan for the world,” or “do you want to change the world?” At this point I got really scared. I had just started writing my book I thought was important for people to read, but then I wondered if this might all be a projection of my love of self.

So I started to question whether I admired myself for creating this book, and I had to say yes in some way, but only because I had never done anything good for anyone else in my life apart from myself.

I was beginning to regret ever opening the book. The questions went on and on, and I became more and more depressed. I wasn't writing a book to help people understand the world, I was writing a book so I would become famous, and people would want my autograph or want to come and talk to me in the street...

I decided I was becoming slightly deranged, and put the book down, never to reopen it. But it did start to get me thinking about my reasons for doing things. Perhaps this book was just another way of projecting how much better I was than everyone else? I couldn't be sure, so I decided to investigate it further with my mind.

Vanity

1. *Feelings of excessive pride* 2. *The trait of being unduly vain and conceited; false pride*

So if I wasn't a narcissist, perhaps I was just vain (*having an exaggerated sense of self-importance*). Perhaps I really had low self-esteem, and I was trying to overcome it with delusions of grandeur. Perhaps I would just like to be important but knew in my heart of hearts that it would never happen, and I was destined for a life of mediocrity and insignificance.

I started to trawl back through my memories to see if there was any truth in it, and there was to some extent.

For as long as I can remember I wanted to be famous. I pretended I was a pop star in my bedroom, after all, I'd bought all the gear, I just had no clue how to use it! I even recorded a song (which was terrible) in a

professional studio. I would look at myself in the mirror singing, and I would go to the karaoke night at the local pub, where (whether due to the state of intoxication of the locals) I would always sound a lot better than them (you know big fish, small pond), and it gave me great feelings of pride to be applauded by them at the end of every song. “You’re such a good singer, alan,” they would say, until it came time for the karaoke competition and outsiders would sign up.

I hated that they were better than me, I hated that they got more applause. I hated going home empty handed afterwards having come a measly fourteenth place. But when I got home, I would think: “I’m better than them, I’ll show them,” but I never did.

I never did well at school either, but I always gave the impression I did. I never did well at work, but that was because everyone else was stupid, not me! Couldn’t they see how much better I was than them? But at job after job, I got sacked for one reason or other. Perhaps they could see that my own feelings of self-importance never matched up to the standard of work I produced.

But after many years of trying to get a good job, I finally landed an contract in information technology, where I was in charge, and that felt good. I had staff working for me, and I walked around the place like I owned it. I had made it, I was important it was no longer just in my imagination. But I became arrogant, I abused my position and was duly sacked.

I felt terrible, like my whole world had collapsed in on me. I was marched out of the front door, told to hand over my company car keys, my laptop, mobile phone and my corporate credit card. I had to call my mum to come and get me. Here was I, an important person in the computer industry, sacked. All the people who had tolerated my haughty behaviour just looked on as I was escorted from the building, and I cursed my mum who had told me so many times:

“Be careful alan, pride comes before a fall.”

“I’m all right, I used to say, nothing’s going to happen to me.”

I may not have been on the top of the pyramid, but even from where I fell from, it hurt – a lot. Images kept revolving in my mind about how this had happened and how stupid I had been. I wasn’t important, I just thought I was.

Vanity shattered

Many years have passed since that unfortunate day, but it was a cycle of self-importance followed by a fall from grace that carried on for many years to come. I won’t bore you with the details but let’s just say it was the same story as the last section.

So, as I tried to resolve this in my mind recently, I tried to imagine what life would have been like if I had never had these feelings of self-importance. Given that I was quite a bright lad and a quick learner, within a few years I could have landed an important job, the problem was, I wasn’t prepared to put the effort into learning the job and paying my dues. I wanted importance now, and when it wasn’t forthcoming, my brain helped me invent the importance. The problem was, I was the only person who couldn’t see I had created an illusion.

So as I sit down to write this topic, I come to you as a man humbled (*subdued or brought low in condition or status, cause to feel shame; hurt the pride of*) by recognition of his own lack of importance, and that whatever I do or say, has no real importance in the world, only that which I place upon it.

Am I the only one?

But that’s enough about me, I want to hear your stories of self-importance, or am I the only human on this planet whose low self-esteem brought about a state in which “I” became all important, if only to myself? Are there any of you out there that think you are more than you are? Do you believe you are important and that you have some special gift to share with the world? And if you did have a special gift would you care if anyone saw you whilst you shared it? Do you see the point of the question?

Those of us who like to think we are special, or important in the world, need others to recognise our talents. We need people to applaud, and we need people to say how great we are as it inflates our (already)

over inflated egos, and we start to feel really proud of ourselves. “We are so proud of our son’s achievements,” I think my parents would like to have said, but they never got the chance.

But in my mind, I was already a high achiever, even if the facts didn't quite match up. “You can fool all the people some of the time, but you can't fool all the people all the time” or something like that, my dad used to say. And it was true to some extent.

I spent my life fooling people I was better than I was, probably fuelled by my mother's constant insistence, “but you are great, alan!,” and me believing it. But when the time came to prove it, the audience were left disappointed, and I walked off with my tail between my legs.

But would it have been different if I was a high achiever? Would it have made a difference to me if I had come first in the karaoke competition or managed to keep my job? Would I have felt right in saying: “Yes, I am proud of my achievements,” or would it have just made me say: “I knew I was the best, I always knew it, I'm great, me!” As I've never been a high achiever I will never know. will I? But I guess the latter.

So how about you? Have you had some time to think about yourself? Have you weighed up your achievements against your own vanity. Do they equal out? Or perhaps like some people who have made great achievements, you just keep quiet, and are only happy that you have managed to do a good job?

The problem with vanity is that it doesn't just exist when people are actually looking, mainly because it exists in your own mind; but that doesn't stop you imagining all the good things that people are saying about you, or will be saying about you, when you get the nobel peace prize, or something equally prestigious. But it's kind of a sad way to live wouldn't you say? Constantly imagining yourself being awarded with prizes or showered with accolades for your (imaginary) great work.

Vanity aside, the problem still exists when the achievements are real. You still court the applause, and the admiration, whether you are a nuclear scientist, sportsman, or businessman. Because it makes you feel good. And your brain likes to feel good. So as you walk up to the podium to collect your “man of the year” award, the brain rewards you with millions of feel good chemicals, and you look out at the audience and pretend you are just a modest man.

Modesty

1. Freedom from vanity or conceit

So how do you know if you are modest? Well, I think it would be fair to say that anyone who is trying to scramble to the top of the pyramid is not modest. They are trying to *be* something, to become something, and they want recognition for it (financial and social); after all, what's the point of trying to reach the top? To save the world?

You see, it doesn't matter if you are trying to do good for the world or just line your own pockets with gold. If you want to be on top, then you must believe that you have a gift, or are in some way superior to other people. You must have faith in yourself, and you must feel important if you are to look and act important. Do you understand?

Do you think the president of any country is a modest man, or does he, like so many of them, believe he has a special purpose in the world “to free the world from tyranny and oppression,” or “to cleanse the world of all evil, oh, and the terrorists.”

You see if you have any position of power you must be important, because the position is “important,” so naturally it rubs off on your ego. And as you are at the top of the pyramid you just have to make one wrong move and down you go!

Of course, all of this climbing and falling is all in your mind. There is no such thing as importance, only self-importance. If we say that the politicians are important men, what we do is give them a label by which they can inflate their own self-importance. If you tell me I am important then I must be!

If there is ever anything important in the world, it is showing kindness to others. The rest is just nonsense, as I found out.

I came to realise that (a) I was not important, and (b) I thought I was important. If I had climbed the pyramid, I would have thought (a) I was important, and (b) I thought I was important. Do you see how insignificant importance is? But we all want it, don't we? We see someone at the top of the pyramid and we

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

think that is going to be me someday; and if we haven't got the talent to climb, we just imagine it in our own minds, but then isn't it all imaginary? All the labels and badges we give people to make them feel important just seek to divide us as a species even more than we are already.

I know now that “I am” and that is the end of it. I am neither important nor unimportant. I am writing this book, but it is just a few hundred pieces of paper bound together, neither important or unimportant – those are just man-made labels. If I had my way, we would remove the words from the dictionary! Then how would we describe ourselves? Oh, yes. Homo sapiens. The end.

[Back to Index](#)

Prisons

1. *A correctional institution where persons are confined while on trial or for punishment*

I have never been to prison, and I never want to go. From everything I have heard they are not sanctuaries of peace. Prisons are places we go when society – the people who have made the laws – find us guilty of something they have expressly forbidden, and believe we should be punished by segregating us from all the “good” people in the country (the people who don't break the law). As with all man-made laws, they can be changed at a whim by the people in power. Ok? So now we've got that straight, let us begin.

You've committed a crime, it's not your first. You've been breaking and entering into properties and stealing goods. Except you got caught – again. Now you're up in front of the magistrate, and the case is being put forward by the prosecution. Burglary and assault.

“...that you were apprehended leaving a property you did not own with goods belonging to the occupants. On being challenged by two police officers you turned violent and lashed out, striking one of the police officer causing him to receive a cut to his face requiring seventeen stitches...”

Of course, you are found guilty, as the evidence is overwhelming.

“I sentence you to three years imprisonment,” says the judge sternly. “Do you have anything to say?”

And off you go. Into the back of a police van, your hands tied behind your back with metal handcuffs. You arrive at prison, hand in your civilian clothing, and are issued with prison clothes. You will now be locked up for three years.

Your only companions have also committed crimes. No one cares why you committed the crime. No one cares a damn about you. You are prisoner 904566 and you will obey. You will do as your told. You will not speak unless spoken to. If you fall out of line, you will be confined to solitary. You are not here to enjoy yourself. You are here to repay your debt to society.

Who will you be when you come out? Will you be a new man? A man who has changed his life forever and wishes to dedicate his life to peace in service of his fellow man? Doubtful!

How about this. You do your time, you meet other people who are “professional” criminals, get a few tips, maybe even do a few drugs when you're inside (seems there's plenty available), develop hate for people in authority, become even more hardened, and as soon as you come out, meet your mates for a few beers down the pub, and start where you left off! Am I getting close?

Prison doesn't work. How can it? You cannot lock up troubled people for 24 hours a day together, they only become more troubled, and more institutionalised. The only thing prison does is take people off the streets so they don't cause any more trouble to the general public, and in the case of murderers and rapists this seems sensible. I wholeheartedly agree that people with problems in their thinking should not be on the streets terrorising others.

For your information, I class anyone who is not compassionate to others as having problems with their thinking. Shocked? Why?

Preceding every action is a thought. “I am going to rob that old lady,” and I do it. But there is a split second before the action where awareness could let compassion in, and you do not carry the act through. So take the robber or the murderer off the streets, the public are happy, they have got “justice,” and the government is pleased, as part of their manifesto was to reduce crime. Everybody's happy. Right? But no one enters into the mind of the person who has been locked up.

Helping people think more compassionately is not the job of the corrections department. Their only job is to contain and control. So you lock the man up for ten years, then you let him out again. How is his thinking? If it hasn't changed, do you not think he will just do the same thing again? Most people in prison are repeat offenders.

The angry prison

I do have empathy with the victims of crime, and I know it is terrible to be on the receiving end of such violence, but don't you think that the only way to help stop violence is to help people think better? So they never again have the thought of hurting other people?

Locking up burly, tattooed, testosterone fuelled, angry men together is a recipe for disaster! It can only create more violence. You cannot meet violence with violence, you must meet violence with compassion. I

know that this seems paradoxical, but it is the only way to take the anger out of it.

Spaces such as prisons are full of angry energy. The bars have anger, the barbed wire has anger, the metal doors and locks have anger in them, the prison guards are full of anger. The whole building is in anger, and that's before you put any prisoners in!

Wow, with all of this negative energy, how can you expect to heal people's minds, which is essential if we are to prevent people committing more crime. Please spend a moment before you apply your conditioned thinking to this problem.

We need to open ourselves to major issues like this, not close them off with worthless unhelpful statements like "he did the crime, he should do the time," or "prison is too good for them," or "we should string up the lot of them." We are compassionate human beings, not a lynch mob, and before we hang everyone for stealing, we have to look back at our past, and in some countries to their present.

How many people do you think have been hung, shot, tied to an electric chair, or beheaded over the years for crimes committed against society? I haven't got any figures, but I'd take a guess at "a lot." These people may have stolen something minor, insulted the king or the ruler, or may have murdered someone. In any case, we (the powerful rulers) decided that the only thing to do with these people was to kill them. An eye for an eye, as some old book once said. We even summarily shot soldiers in the British army for cowardice!

Today, each country has its own scale of punishments varying from a public flogging through to having "electricity passed through your body until you are dead." Sorry, just in case you didn't realise, these are the "good" people who were doing all the killing. The people "lucky" enough to survive the death penalty are locked up in prison for varying terms, normally a couple of months through to life (twenty years plus).

One thing you should know is that locking up prisoners costs an awful lot of money. But don't worry, the taxpayer funds it all. Oh sorry, that's you isn't it?

During people's time in prison, they may do some work, learn a new trade (depending on how long they're in for) or they may be locked up in solitary for long periods at a time. They may experience inhuman cruelty (on the part of guards, and other prisoners), mental torture, physical abuse, and may be sexually attacked or raped (this is the men we're talking about). They may find themselves having to pay for "protection" from other prisoners, and may become involved with drugs.

At the end of their prison term, they will be released back into the community, usually under the watchful eye of their probation officer who will make sure they "reintegrate." Chances of successful reintegration? You tell me. Conditioned and institutionalised, with no change in thinking, what are their chances? How will they lead a more peaceful and balanced life? Will they continue to bring pain and suffering to the rest of the community?

The way our justice system works is ancient; it doesn't deal with people, it deals with crimes. It is a processing and enforcing system for people who have gone against the laws of the land (even if they are unjust, or breach human rights). No one is an individual. You are just a criminal. You are just a case number.

"So how do we progress?" you ask. "How do we keep people who are dangerous off the streets? We must imprison them. They must pay their debt to society!"

But dangerous people are only dangerous because their mind is in turmoil. If we have to keep people segregated for a period of time, we need to start approaching the process with compassion and understanding.

I am not suggesting we forget the victims of crime, but if we don't help the person who has committed the crime, we will have many more victims, the costs will be enormous, and we will not have progressed.

The first thing you have to know about violent offenders is that they probably didn't come from a stable family home where they were showered with love every day. They are more likely to have come from violent homes themselves, and unable to show love and compassion to others. If they don't get help to work through trauma, it is unlikely that they will become compassionate individuals on their own. Instead, they will continue to be violent, and if exposed to regular prison, will try to assert their authority by guess what? Violence.

Meet violence with compassion

We already lock up too many people. It doesn't help in the long term. We cannot deal with a problem by just

locking people up. We need a fresh open-minded view. This is the view you and I will create here.

Crime and the causes of crime, are in a separate topic as is punishment so we will start this creative dialogue where people have already been found guilty of a crime. We have to assume we will still have laws and courts for the foreseeable future, and that some people will still be locked up for the security of the public (we must exclude the mentally ill from this process as they must be treated like anyone else with an illness).

The other people who are usually locked up including fraudsters, and petty criminals, should now not be locked up.

Segregation should only be used when the person's use of violence would cause people to fear for their immediate safety. So that will cut down the number of people we need to look after dramatically. I am not suggesting they get off scot free, but follow this program at a day centre. What do you think so far? I can feel you getting uncomfortable already.

The reason we believe that most people should be locked up is out of revenge and "justice," not because we fear them, so go with me on this for a moment.

If we have to build somewhere to help people with problems of violence, it needs to be in a place where there is love and compassion, not a prison where the man-made metal bars are as violent as the prisoners themselves. This should be a place which nurtures the person's mind and body.

Before you start saying "We need to be tougher on crime, not softer," answer me this. "Has the present prison system stopped people offending? Are people afraid to murder people in case they go to jail?" Given the number of prisoners currently on death row in the usa, I would have to say no. Would you agree?

Instead of grey walls to hurt prisoners and remind them of what they have done, we need soft colours and gentle curves, not harshness and austerity. Think I'm mad yet? The place must be calming and the doors should close softly, not the violent sounds of metal against metal. The food should be vegetarian, to remove the violence of the death of the animal. Instead of prison warders, I see monks! Not preaching religious texts, but as teachers; teachers of meditation, one of the best ways to calm the violent mind.

The still mind knows no violence and is open to compassion and love. The present system encourages people to be violent. It is not a deterrent, it just helps governments get re-elected by citizens afraid of being attacked in their homes.

Perhaps we could teach them martial arts like tai-chi, a chinese system of slow meditative physical exercise designed for relaxation, balance and health. A tai-chi practitioner knows he has the capacity for violence, but knows he will never use it and can help the violent man to understand his violence and transform it into a positive energy. What do you think? I'm just thinking out loud here. Meditation, whether sitting or walking, calms the mind and creates harmony around us. It does so by slowing the brainwaves down. How does it do that? Don't ask me the technical stuff, it just does.

To any prisoner, a question...

Dear prisoner

Imagine you, the violent man, walking with mindfulness (the trait of staying aware of (paying close attention to) your responsibilities), strong of body, calm of mind, filled with compassion for other beings. Dedicated to creating in life, not destroying it.

Who is this man? This man of peace, who comes forward into the light?

You. Free from violence, having transformed it into positive energy.

Who would you prefer to be? The meditator who walks tall and strong through the earth, helping people and being respected for his gentleness and compassion, or the violent criminal, who gets the respect he wants by beating people to a pulp, by murder, and by intimidation? Who is the weaker man here? Please consider it.

Can I help you to transform yourself, can I give you the spark you need to go through to the other side of violence, which is compassion?

One thing I am sure of, is that the authorities, no matter which party is in charge, have no intention of dismantling these grey prisons of violence. In fact they probably intend to build more. They only see the

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

short term solution of locking people up, that is what they think the public want, so that is what they do.

It doesn't matter if this same process has failed continually for hundreds of years. Like all politicians, they try to reform everything, but if the apple is rotten from the core, what is the point of reforming it, it is still the same apple. This needs an internal revolution on the part of everyone to see prison for what it is – a breeding ground for more violence.

Don't wait...

Don't wait for the new meditation centres to be built. Don't wait for the painters to come in and paint your cell in pastels, don't wait for the monks to come in and teach you compassion, these things may never happen. If you are ready to transform your life, I mean really ready, you will have to go it alone. The first thing you will need to do is probably the hardest thing you will ever do, and that is to become soft, and open to new energies – positive ones.

You will have to start by sitting, not talking, and just being quiet. You can also do this whilst walking. It is amazing the anger and violence that dissipates just by being silent. You don't have to try this, it's purely voluntary but if you're going to be there a while anyway, you can see it as a training ground, much like the monks do.

This is no longer a prison to cage you, this is your personal retreat! If the monks can spend ten years in isolation enduring hardship, then I'm sure you can.

No longer are the bars there to keep you in, they are unimportant. You are on a journey to self-awareness, a journey that will take you past the most dangerous demons in your mind. They will be more dangerous than any man you have ever faced. Do not engage these demons, just watch them go past silently. They will pass and eventually, through meditation, they will disappear.

Forget the walls that close you in, you are imprisoned by your mind. Your thinking is what imprisons you into a life of violence and crime.

It does not matter where you are. Until you transcend that violence, until you free yourself from your own thoughts you will be forever in your own personal prison. Sit a while..

*your friend
alan*

Oh, and if you are reading this and you work for any corrections centres or government agencies anywhere in the world, please could you help me out by distributing about five million meditation cushions and providing a nice quiet space for “your prisoners” to practice in? The future victims of crime and the prisoners will thank you for it. Oh, and so do I.

[Back to Index](#)

Progress

1. *Gradual improvement or growth or development*
2. *The act of moving forward toward a goal*
3. *Develop in a positive way*
4. *Move forward, also in the metaphorical sense*

What is progress? Well, according to the definition, it is gradual improvement, developing in a positive way or moving forward towards a goal. So let's start our discussion with the last item. If progress could be defined as moving forward towards a goal, what would our goal be as the human race? Is there a goal? Where are we progressing to? Is there an end point?

I don't know about you, but I have never seen any indication of a goal we were trying to reach, although I have to admit that there have been many improvements along the way; and I'm sure there will be many to come.

Apparently, we started off somewhere in africa, with nothing but the skin on our backs, and gradually started to spread out towards asia and europe.

Let's stop for a moment and compare where we are now, with that image of our distant ancestors out looking for food every day in the forest. I think we could agree that we have progressed.

Fellow humans, animals and the planet in general, have paid a terrible price over the years, and some people would undeniably question if our endeavours – however noble they may have seemed at the time – have ultimately been worth it. But for our discussion, there is no point in looking back at the past. We are here. We are in the now. Let us concentrate on today.

Neanderthal man vs. City latte man

It's no competition, is it? Neanderthal man out scraping together some food for himself and his family, wearing clothing made from animal furs and skins vs. modern man out shopping at the latest supermarket, wearing the latest fashion, arriving in style in his car, and going home to his warm comfortable house, where his children are (over) well fed every day, and go to school to be educated. If our ancestors were alive today, they wouldn't believe what has happened to the planet.

Imagine now you have time travelled from about 35,000 years ago, and have arrived in central london. What would you think, what would you see, what would you feel? You'd certainly be shocked at the changes.

Concrete buildings, skyscrapers, cars, and aeroplanes, people in tailored clothes, food available to eat now or cook later. People dressed in suits, all rushing about, going nowhere in a hurry. Imagine the noise and the volume of people. The noise from cars and buses, the music blaring out from fashion clothing shops, people shouting, the smell from the traffic fumes, everybody passing each other in silence.

Now quickly, you are transported back 35,000 years. What do you see? Grass lands, marsh, trees, no rushing, no unnatural noise (no supermarkets either, nor comforts nor convenience and a short life expectancy to top it all).

Now quickly you are transported forward to 2100. (93 years from now) What will you see? What will you smell? Who will be there? What will london look like? I only ask you to imagine the future, because if recent "progress" is anything to go by, it is anyone's guess as to what Man will have done to the planet, let alone one city.

According to scientists, planet earth was created about four billion years ago, but it is only since the second world war that things have really started speeding up. Now nearly everybody in the developed world has a car, can buy their food at supermarkets, has satellite tv, central heating, hot water, education, healthcare, takeaway restaurants, public transportation, and mobile telecommunications. We have everything we could possibly want to make our lives easier, so in 2100 where could progress take us to next? Could it be that we don't have to go out to work anymore, and all the jobs are done by robots, so we can enjoy maximum leisure time? Maybe we will no longer need to use our limbs because everything is automated; or maybe we will not need to grow food anymore because chemists will have been able to make it artificially. Who knows where we will progress to technologically.

We are more healthy than our ancestors, we live longer, we can enjoy the world more because we are no longer having to spend most of our day out gathering berries or hunting animals. We have comfort. Even people with little money still have more than our ancestors did.

In most developed countries, we have a social welfare program, and some form of healthcare system to heal you when you are sick. Compare that with 35,000 years ago, where you would have to just lay down and die when you were sick.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Yes, we have definitely progressed in the physical material sense. We have a lot more than our ancestors ever did, and yes, we do seem to be happier. Our children are better looked after, most countries have a compulsory education system, and most people have some degree of literacy. All in all, we've done pretty well for ourselves, we homo sapiens. We started with nothing and look what we have achieved.

We have discovered how to make several hundred tons of metal fly safely in the sky from one corner of the globe to the other. We can cure all but the most complicated diseases. We can make sure we never go hungry by flying food from one country to another. Yet for all our material progress, we seem to be missing something...

People are still going hungry, people still can't read and write, people are abused and oppressed; people kill and are killed; men beat their wives; women beat their children; we cut down our forests; we pollute our rivers and oceans; we are angry; we are greedy; we are selfish; we are vengeful; we steal; we conquer; we lie; and we cheat.

"Still," you say, "we can't progress in everything at once, things take time."

Except the development of the material world has been astoundingly swift, and the mere human has not yet caught up. Unfortunately, we still share many characteristics with our ancestors, and although we have progressed slightly by reducing the number of people we cold bloodedly slaughter in any given year, it seems that for all our skyscrapers and lunar achievements, we still haven't developed compassion for others. We have a mind capable of great intelligence and the capacity for great tenderness, but we choose to be warlike. I know I have mentioned it a hundred times in this book, but I make no apologies for it.

Throughout time, individuals have got rich whilst other people suffer, all in the name of progress. But who is this progress for? Humanity? The earth?

Let's start by redefining progress, shall we?

As an individual, I may see progress as steadily getting a better job over time, and earning more money. For a company, progress may mean healthier profits every year, lower costs, and a position as market leader. For a country, progress may mean a booming economy, lower crime rates and a healthier working population. But what is the next stage up from a country? Surely it is the earth. What is the goal or objective for the earth? Is there one? And if so who's goal is it?

It seems to me we are only concerned with our little piece of the pie. Does an individual think of progress in terms of what is good for the planet as a whole? Of course he doesn't. He is concerned with himself, and perhaps if they are lucky, his family. But individuals have been encouraged by the state to forget about anyone else. Forget about the environment. Forget about the starving and the desperate. Forget about doing the right thing. As long as we say it's legal concentrate on what is important. Making Money.

The fact that making money is placed on the priority list of almost everyone of working age, means there is no room for anything else. Making money takes up all of your concentration and energy. Sure, you may donate a few pounds to a few charities every now and then, but you certainly wouldn't leave yourself short, would you? You've got some money, so you give some away. You may even make yourself feel better by volunteering your time at some worthwhile charities, or you may even start a charity of your own like several multi-billion dollar corporations have done. The caring face of capitalism! But with some, I can't help thinking it's much like the land mine manufacturer setting up a hospital offering treatment for land mine victims!

We should not be surprised that individuals want to progress, it is human nature to want to improve, to try to do things better, but most people seem to concentrate on external, material improvements. But hang on, here's an idea, what about an internal improvement? Internal progress.

Given we're so smart (most intellectual species on the planet and all), it shouldn't be hard for us, it will give us a bit of a challenge. We've already split the atom, we can fly to the moon and we can talk to someone on the other side of the planet who's walking down the street. If we can do all these really, really complicated things (and believe me they *are* complicated), surely we must be able to progress in the being human department?

Come on! It's so easy. All you have to do is develop some compassion and empathy for your fellow humans – you know, the ones you ignore in your busy money making individual pursuit schedule.

Do you not think that real progress in the world can be made by devoting some of that already huge attention to yourselves on something more important than self-interest? I am not talking about working for worthwhile causes etc., as most of these charities have had to be set up because of other humans who have

no compassion for others. The only thing I am asking you to do – in fact pleading with you to do – is to try to develop compassion. Remember the definition? *“The humane quality of understanding the suffering of others and wanting to do something about it.”*

I can tell you, it feels good not to just be thinking about myself anymore. I still wish to progress personally, but not at the expense of others. All I asked myself was: “Is what I am doing affecting others adversely?” And I have made a commitment to never undertake any work that contradicts this.

It doesn't mean you have to stop earning money, after all, it is the only recognised international method of exchange, but if your personal progress is the sum of your bank account, your house, your car, and your possessions, then you truly have missed out; and so have the other people in the world who could benefit from your compassion. After all, all humans are born equal. Naked and helpless. It is the compassion and love of others that helps them grow.

Progress *is* important. It makes us feel as if we are improving. The very word indicates a positive event. War and murder could never be seen as progress. So let us progress on this earth together. Individual by nature, joined by common goal, peace on our planet. Not by protesting for peace, but by developing compassion. It's nice to have nice things, nice houses, cars, etc. but remember whilst there is no peace in man, all that is dear to you (your career, your money, your status, your possessions) could go up in smoke at the push of one man's finger on a nuclear button.

Think about it. All the progress you have made individually would be worthless. Everything you believed in would have no meaning. Everything would return to dust. All at the push of a button. That is why real progress can only be made internally. Everything else we progress in, is ultimately nothing. Please go into this with me now. By developing compassion, the progress you make internally will deeply effect others externally. Positively. The world around you will be different. Why? Because you will be different.

Gone will be the selfish, me, me, me, individual, who cares about nothing but making money and having a good time, and in its place will be someone who will make a difference in the world. Just by being compassionate, loving and empathic to all who exist here. It sounds so easy. Do it now.

Stop. Think about what you are doing. What are your goals? Are you only thinking about making money to support “me and my family?” “Does anything I do or say affect others adversely?” If it does, isn't it time to rethink? Remember you may be dead in a few years, but there are hopefully many more generations to come. Let them enjoy this planet too. Let us all progress together. Humans, animals, birds, fish, insects, and the planet itself. Let us progress through compassion, not technology.

[Back to Index](#)

Punishment

1. *Impose a penalty on; inflict punishment on*

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

You have been bad – you deserve to be punished
I am going to teach you a lesson

The need to inflict punishment – the quintessential human trait? What do you think? Do you think people who have been “bad” deserve to be punished? If so, how do you decide what is “bad.” Does someone tell you, or do you just “know?”

This is an important topic, and I would like you all to pay careful attention while we explore this. All over the world, at this moment, children are being punished for disobeying their parents, or for doing something their parents disapprove of; and grown men and women are being punished for committing offences against the laws of the country. What I want to know is does punishment work? “Of course it does,” your mind interjects, “if someone has done something wrong, they deserve to be punished, simple as that.”

Punishments range from being hit on the bottom by a shoe from your teacher, hit with a belt, or denied your freedom; to nice ones like being flogged in public, or having your hands chopped off for such offences as stealing – if possible, punishment should always involve a bit of physical pain.

Since the dawn of civilisation, powerful men have sought to keep everyone under control with the threat of physical violence, using it freely to teach the others that if they did a similar thing, they would get the same, except it has never really worked has it? It doesn't “teach you a lesson,” it just hurts you, and creates violence in the minds of those on the receiving end. They vow revenge on the people who did this to them, and to be fair, I can see where they're coming from!

I remember my childhood, which I must stress was fairly normal. My parents cared for me and I think they loved me, but I remember every time I did something that wasn't to their liking, that upset or disappointed them, (say by misbehaving at school), I was smacked on the bottom, which invariably made me cry. I was then sent to my room for the rest of the night.

Even at junior school, I remember getting “the slipper” from the headmaster, which was actually a rather solid trainer. Being made to face the wall was another popular punishment.

Senior school was no better. I was a pretty good student, although I messed around in class in the subjects I wasn't good at (which could have been distracting for other students who wished to learn, and for the teacher).

It is only as I write this, that I realise how many times I was hit, had things thrown at me, and was sent to the headmasters office, usually to be hit again, this time with a long stick used as a cane. I had board rubbers hurled at me, and was hit on the head numerous times by one american maths teacher who used to pick up our heavy maths books above our heads and rain them down on our skulls! He also used to like hitting us with our own rulers.

Then there was the biology teacher with the huge hands (I still have visions of them). I remember being lifted out of my seat by the hair for talking with the boy next to me, and then he banged our heads together as he let go! “It never did *me* any harm,” I hear most of you saying, but we will never really know what effect it had.

The idea of punishment as to help teach you correct behaviour was applied throughout the whole school. If we answered back to anyone in the sixth form (boys aged 17 to 18) or did something like running in the corridor, we were “awarded” a work squad, which involved picking up litter and other tasks *after* school. As I lived over fifteen miles away, this meant I would miss my bus and have to phone my mum to come and pick me up. She would inevitably chastise me for “getting into trouble” and making her have to come out and get me, and I would be sent to my room when I got home. As if growing up isn't hard enough!

This is a crucial stage in a child's development. This period is not about learning mathematics or being able to repeat historical facts, this is about a child forming its world view, learning to find his or her place in society, learning about themselves and the opposite sex, and what do we get? Physical violence as our teacher!

I really want to enter the minds of those inflicting the punishment, to see what they believe it is actually achieving. People make mistakes, sometimes they do things without thinking, and anyway right and wrong is a man-made concept.

Surely the way forward to develop a compassionate and loving world is to help them understand what it is they have done, and why it has upset us so much; and at the same time look at ourselves to see why we have got upset. It is only by understanding that the reason we punish comes out of a need to control others, to force them to bend to our will, that we can start to evolve our minds.

You may argue that someone who kills or steals should be punished, but that is only a control mechanism. It does not guarantee he won't do it again.

Look how many people have been hung or imprisoned for life. People are still killing others. Just because there is the threat of punishment doesn't make them stop. I knew that by messing about in class I would get the slipper, but I still did it. I knew that my parents would be angry and punish me if I failed my exams, or was "bad" in school, but it didn't stop me failing. People are not put off by the threat of punishment. If they were, there wouldn't be so many people on death row. Humans act first and think later. What do you think? I do not want to convince you, I want you to see it for yourselves.

Several years ago, I purchased a dog. He was a beautiful golden labrador. He had huge eyes, big paws, was *very* fluffy, and I instantly adored him. The thing was, he just wouldn't do as he was told. He utterly refused to sit when I said "sit," so I smacked him. He ran away when I said "stay," so I smacked him. He went to the toilet on the carpet when I said "don't," so I smacked him. He ran out in the road when I said "don't," so I smacked him.

I didn't think I was being violent. I thought I was doing it to teach the dog something that was in his own best interest! Everybody did it, I wasn't being cruel or so I believed.

If you hadn't noticed, this was a dog that (a) didn't speak the language of humans, and (b) was only five months old, yet I treated him like a human. In fact, this is how many humans treat their children. We don't mean to be violent, but we are frustrated or afraid when humans or animals do not do what we tell them, especially, and here's the crunch, when we believe it is "for their own good." We are afraid when the puppy runs out in the road in case he is killed. We are afraid that the child will not do well at school and so not have a fulfilling life. When it comes to it, we really do deeply believe – maybe not even at a conscious level – that violence is a good teacher.

"It's not violence," I hear one of you say, "it's just a little tap on the bottom. My parents did it to me, and it didn't do me any harm."

We still believe that punishment – which is violence – is the way to get order and submission. All it does at a deeper level is breed resentment and hate on the part of the child or the animal.

This reminds me of the way humans break horses and other animals to get them to do what they want. At first they are "wild." But through "training" (with a whip), they magically become docile and submissive. Is that what we really want for the human race – submissiveness?

I guess what this comes down to, is our human interpretation of what's right and wrong. Some would say that there are universal laws which go above Man's laws, including laws that state it is wrong to kill and steal. But let's go behind the word to find out the truth of it. Let us look to the animal kingdom to view these universal laws.

You see, the animal kingdom does not have our laws and sense of "justice," or long drawn out punishments. Animals regularly fight each other (like humans), but sometimes they manage to kill each other (like humans). They are quite happy to steal food from a neighbour (like humans), and sometimes, they steal someone else's partner (like humans). You only have to look at groups of wild animals to see how their behaviour and ours is similar. As such, maybe the things we consider to be wrong are expressions of animalistic behaviour, and that is the reason we wish to suppress them. These are traits which run through us all, even in this modern world. We all have the capacity to kill, I have it, and so do you. If we were hungry, we would steal food. If we were in love with someone, we would try to take them away from their current partner.

Is it maybe a small coincidence that these are the things humans have made against the law? We don't want humans to be like that, we want them to be different to the animals. We want to stand and say: "I am homo sapiens, I am human, I am not an animal." But of course we are, and we want to hide it. That is why we need to punish any behaviour that does not conform to the ideal of being human. We want children to conform, we want dogs to conform, we want adults to conform.

Tell me something, how different would the world be if we did not punish people for what they did, given that there are already punishments in place for breaking the law, and people still do what they like? As it stands now, most people are not killers, most people do not steal, and most people are quite orderly in their lives. They go to work, they pay their bills, children study, people pass exams. But what if you removed the threat of punishment, do you think the world would collapse into armageddon? Would everyone be killing

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

everyone? I don't think so. Do you?

People, like animals, generally get on with their lives pretty peacefully, and if you look at the number of people in the world versus the number of conflicts, you will see that, unlike the press reports which are splashed all over our television screens, the inhabitants of the world are just getting on with the daily business of living! When animals are in conflict, kill another, or go against the rest of the herd, a natural process takes place, whereby the animal concerned leaves the herd or the conflict is resolved. Animals, unlike humans have not come up with unusually cruel and inhumane methods of punishment such as exist today.

Fortunately, they don't have the intelligence to be so cruel, although the very act of punishment indicates a lack of intelligence.

So why do it? Why create violence, which is punishment, when it makes no difference to whether a crime is committed. Government departments would argue the case here with their statistics, that “if you didn't have punishment, everybody would go crazy and kill each other,” but that's what they want you to believe. If you want the truth, spend some time observing animals in action and tell me we need to punish anybody. Guide and nurture maybe, but punish? Never.

[Back to Index](#)

Q

Questions

1. *Uncertainty about the truth or factuality of existence of something*
2. *A sentence of inquiry that asks for a reply*

Don't question me, just do as I say!

How many of us heard that statement when we were growing up? I certainly did on countless occasions. Parents see it as their duty to pass information to their children, and for that information to be taken as the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Parents and teachers do not expect to be questioned by children. “Children should be seen and not heard” was a popular phrase from Victorian times. You would think we'd have moved on by now from that antiquated approach, but we haven't.

Adults are the fountain of knowledge and experience (as they see it), and by being that bit older, have earned the divine right to always be right. Children being children, accept what their parent or teacher is telling them – whether they actually believe it or whether they just fear to question them – in case they are shouted at or punished. But as we all know, adults can be wrong! Amazing, isn't it?

I wouldn't have believed it until I became a fully fledged adult (at the age of 38), and realised I didn't know anything at all. I was a beginner at this game called life. I had so many questions, and so few answers, and the more time I spent with my ageing parents the more I realised that, actually, they were beginners too, and they were in their seventies! Why then did they stop me asking questions when I was young?

“Why is the sky blue, dad?”

“It just is, son.”

This is how this book came about.

I didn't plan to write a book, I just started to inquire into everything, and I realised that not only did I not have the answers, neither did anyone else. I read book upon book, seeking an answer, and I realised that actually what was missing was the right questions. The main question in my mind was, are there some things that are above questioning, some things which are absolute truths? I pondered this for a long time.

Stop for a moment and mull this over in your own mind. What could be taken as unquestionable? What is fact?

“On reflection,” I thought, “I know, the earth is round. Scientists have proved it, I have seen the pictures from space, and the only reason people thought it was flat, is that they had no way of going up into the atmosphere,” but then I stopped. How many scientific discoveries have been made and then a century or two later, utterly disproved? Could the earth being round be disproved by some scientist who asked the question another way? It has happened in the past, and it could happen again.

Obviously there are simple things which help us live our life more safely, like sticking to driving on one side of the road. You can question it all you like, but the fact remains that it is a mere safety device to stop us all from crashing in to each other! So although questions are vital, sometimes we have to accept things are the way they are for a reason, or do we? Should we question everything in the world or just the important things? But then again, who decides what is important? Maybe if you question everything you will eventually go mad. Be on the safe side, save your sanity, don't ask anything!

Children are great questioners.

“Mum? Mum? MUM! Why is the...”

“Because I say it is, all right? Now leave me alone!”

As adults, we may find children's questions cute or even endearing, but we don't really take them seriously, do we? I remember watching a tv program on the bbc, where some schoolchildren were interviewing the prime minister of Britain. They were asking him serious questions, and although he was answering them, there was a certain dismissiveness of the children. It was almost as if he felt at ease answering questions on the war in the middle east, questions that only days earlier were being asked by a “serious” adult journalist. He certainly seemed to be less worried about the interview because it was with children. Condescending, was one thought I had when I watched it, and I felt myself getting angry about the whole thing!

Why do adults palm off (*sell as genuine, sell with the intention to deceive*) children with disinterest or show at the very most, a feigned interest in what they are asking? Is this unfair? Do adults (*a fully developed person from maturity onward*) treat young questioners seriously? Are the questions children ask, naive and stupid, or are we too busy just living life to be bothered with any more questions? We're tired. We work hard, we have to provide, pay the mortgage, pay the bills, buy the children's clothes. That's real life, not asking silly questions. When they grow up, they'll see. And indeed they do, as most children pass into adulthood having passed or failed their exams, ready to ask the ultimate questions...

“How much do I get a week?” “What are the hours?” And so the questions end, and real life begins. Forty five years of work ahead.

The time for frivolity is over. You must earn a living. You must go to work every day to pay your bills, and eventually you will have children, and you have to support them. Pretty soon, the inquisitiveness you had as a youngster is snuffed out by the need to earn money. Look how far asking those silly questions got you. You soon forget that you ever had an inquiring mind. You learn that acceptance is the only way forward. Especially if you want a simple life.

The inquiring mind searching for truth

As I have found out in recent years, questions cause pain – by questioning yourself, and all the world around you. Why am I like this, why do I behave like that? Why are people so angry? Why does everyone fight each other? Why do we destroy so much? Why does no one question anything!

If you are anything like me, once you open your mind, and starting asking difficult questions, you will find you can't stop. I question everything! Not out loud all the time of course, otherwise I would drive everybody mad; but it is driving me mad, asking difficult questions to which there seem to be no answers. Such as, why am I bothering to ask all these difficult questions when no one else seems to care? What is the point of trying to help the world when everyone else seems quite happy and don't want to be helped? Why am I a vegetarian, when all I get is rude comments and people telling me the same thing over and over? “Man is a meat eater, he has always been a meat eater, and always will be a meat eater.” Why am I putting myself through this, when I could have such a simple life?

Even as I write this now I am questioning myself. I am questioning my motives for doing this. I am questioning myself whether I will be happy when it is finished – and indeed what will I do? You see, although I am committed to world peace, compassion, and love for all creatures on the planet, I wonder how committed I really am. Let me tell you a short story.

I can't remember if I was much of a questioner when I was young, or throughout my schooling, but as I got older, and started to work, I did start to question more. Not questions like “what is the nature of reality?” but rather more simple questions like “why do we have to do it this way, isn't there a better way we can do it?” more often than not, directed at my boss. This caused great conflict in the work place for me, as questioning your “superior's” decisions isn't recommended if you want to have a successful career. So I questioned the way we were doing things more quietly, but that just led to more friction, because I would go ahead and do things a different way. “Troublemaker” was the word on the lips of most of my managers.

“Troublemaker!” I couldn't believe it, all I wanted to do was help improve things. But you see they didn't want me to question things, or help to improve things, because these were their ideas I was challenging. They didn't want me to question them, because that may prove them wrong, even though that was the last thing I wanted to do. I could see a better way, so I did it. This inevitably got me fired from more jobs than I care to mention.

I found that the only way for me to work was independently as an information technology consultant where I could question to my heart's content and people would pay me to do it! At last I had found an area where I could use my inquiring mind and not have it crushed under the weight of conformity and acceptance. Admittedly it was in business, and not securing world peace but that was what I knew about, and back then, I wasn't interested in world peace; just plenty of money at the end of the week, so I could enjoy the things I liked doing.

I suppose that questioning the nature of life was a natural extension to my years of questioning in computing.

You may find that strange to hear, but as soon as I left my job I went travelling to australia (two days later). Nothing had changed in my mind, but now there were no managers to question, no systems to question, there were only people and life – so question I did! Why are people like this, why is nature like that? And here I am writing it all down for you eight years later. Still questioning.

So what have I learned? Have all my questions been answered? No. But the main thing is, I am still

interested enough to be inquisitive. But it's becoming more difficult for me now, as the more I question, the more upset I get at other peoples thoughtless actions. This time it's not about the change to a procedure or a work flow document, this time it's about peoples lives, peoples hopes, dreams and disappointments. This time it is about defenceless children and brutal parents.

Suddenly my inquisitiveness has gone too far. This time I have questioned too much. Maybe with hindsight I should have just left it, it would have been a lot easier! Do you follow what I'm saying? Years before I had questioned interesting, but ultimately insignificant topics and events, but now I am questioning our very existence; and it hurts. It hurts because now I care. Now I am stuck, to be blunt with you. I am stuck because I can't get out of feeling this way – this need to interrogate life, to seek truth.

I am not religious, and I am not trying to get to heaven or nirvana, I am just trying to understand why we, as the most intelligent species on the planet, continue on a minute-by-minute basis, to destroy, not only each other, but the planet we share. Why we become addicted to pleasure, and why we seek this entity called god above all else in the world?

I have posed a thousand questions to myself, and I have posed a thousand questions to you, but in the end, do either of us care enough to answer them?

I ask myself what it would take to make me go back to my old life; my comfortable flat, my nice four wheel drive jeep, my girlfriends with nice make-up and jewellery, my well paid exciting job, my evenings out at pubs and restaurants (not worrying about whether they have vegetarian options), nice holidays, and fun times? I have to be honest with you, sometimes I don't think it would take very much. Not because of a lack of commitment to peace and compassion, but because I wonder why I should care!

What I mean is, why bother putting yourself through all of these changes, if no one else gives a damn. They are busy just enjoying their lives, earning money, they don't look like they have a care in the world. "These people may look happy, but deep down they are deeply unhappy," say the spiritual lot. Yeah? Well maybe they *are* superficially happy, but as long as that superficial happiness lasts about seventy years, they'll have a pretty good time.

On the other hand, I wonder what the world would be like if we all could live happily together?

I come from a stable, wealthy country, so whether people are killing each other in wars or not doesn't really concern me. I come from a wealthy southern town where work is plentiful and the pay excellent. By achieving social equality for all, and removing poverty across the "third world" what would that mean to me? What benefit would that bring me? If all the animals that are killed and eaten are no longer killed and eaten, what difference does it make to me? None. I am already a vegetarian. Maybe it would boost my ego and make me feel good about having done something "worthwhile" and "positive" for the world, but my ego is only good for another forty years or so. Then, like me, it will disappear.

Can anyone tell me if there is any benefit in writing this book? Will anyone read it? Is this just my vanity at wanting to achieve fame by getting a book published. Do I just want to impress people and have people say "Oh look, that's alan orr, he wrote that book; you know, the one that helped people change and ultimately saved the world!"

Maybe I want to impress you with my range of knowledge about diverse subjects. Maybe I really do care. But how will you know? You see the dilemma we put ourselves in when we start to ask questions?

So whatever my ambivalent feelings are towards the path I have chosen, whether I want to care, or choose not to give a damn, the fact remains that I have questioned; and by that very fact, I have closed off the path I came from. There is no going back. Once the mind starts to open, and becomes an inquiring mind, life can never be the same for you again. Sure, you may irritate a few people, you may anger others, and you may wish you had never bothered to ask, but that is one beautiful thing about being human, the ability to question "why?" "Why am I here? Who am I, Where are we?"

Whilst we continue to inquire we shall progress, no matter how slowly, and things will improve. People will become more compassionate towards all creatures. People will show more love to each other. People will empathise with one another.

Never stop questioning. No matter how many people tell you the "answer," there is no one answer.

But I think this whole divide between child and adult needs to be redrawn, for I know many more intelligent children than I do adults! Innocence and naivety one might call it, but the more we stop children inquiring about everything, the more adults we will have who just accept that things are as they are.

Children are only legally children between zero and seventeen (in most countries), but on their eighteenth

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

birthday, they become an adult. They have responsibilities. They can drink, smoke, vote, go to war, get married. Now they are an adult, people will listen to them. Yet just the day before, they were a child that everyone ignored. “Dad...why does...?”

Let your children ask questions, however many they want, do not just palm them off. They are inquiring into life, do not shut them out just because you are tired, and have had to work hard. While you're at it, maybe ask a few questions yourselves.

Never stop questioning. Ever

[Back to Index](#)

R

Recycling

1. *The act of processing used or abandoned materials for use in creating new products*

Recycling has become all the rage in some parts now. Some countries and regions still don't do it, but that will change soon, they say. People are becoming more responsible, they say.

“Oh yes, of course I recycle. Glass, plastics and cans together in the black box, grass and vegetables in the green bin, newspapers and cardboard in the black bin with a green lid.”

Some councils are really getting on the ball with recycling now. Some places will even fine you if you don't recycle. We all look for the recycle logo on the products, and we feel good when we put it in the right bin.

Of course we should feel good, we *are* actually doing something right, and just in time, I might add. It took a government awareness scheme to get people to wake up to recycling but eventually – in this country at least – we are getting there and I'm sure other countries are too...

Sorry to interrupt myself, but getting where exactly? We are all told that we are recycling a lot and that we need to recycle more, but how much is enough? Is everything I put out to be recycled, actually recycled? How much of what goes into my special bins turns into something else? I don't want to spoil the party, but could this whole recycling thing be yet another smokescreen to justify global consumerism on a massive scale?

Packaging

1. Material used to make packages

Let us start our discussion today by examining the causes of the need to recycle. One word: Packaging. Well, it can't be anything else really can it? Of course, there are other things like electrical goods, metal etc. but packaging is the main culprit. Plastic, paper, cardboard, glass, polystyrene – all covering the product we are so desperate to get our hands on. We greedily tear away at the packaging to reveal the prized item we have just bought, and toss aside the tree that was cut down for us.

There are companies working diligently, the whole world over, trying to make a more environmentally friendly packaging solution which will see us through another twenty years or so of consumerism. The scary thing is that we have only been on a mad buying spree since the early eighties, and we show no sign of slowing down; so if we're already starting to worry about the amount of packaging we are using, and where we are going to get the next lot from, we may be in trouble.

Businesses need to keep selling us stuff to stay afloat, pay their bills and make a little profit to reinvest in new products etc. so in order for them to keep going, we have to buy stuff. They don't want us to get an environmental conscience. If we don't buy their products, some poor man in indonesia or ipswich will lose their job.

This will have the knock on effect of him having to claim social security, which means the tax payers will have to fork out more money. He will start to lose his self-esteem, and he may become depressed and start drinking, which will mean he has no money for food. This may cause him to become angry and beat up his wife, which will leave her bandaged in hospital at the cost of the taxpayer. He will then end up in the police station and then the magistrate's court, where it takes up people's valuable time to try him on charges of assault. He is found guilty and sentenced to six months imprisonment at the expense of the taxpayer, whereby on release he finds that his home has been repossessed, and his wife has moved in with another man. On hearing this, he flies into a jealous rage, drinks half a bottle of whisky grabs a knife from the kitchen, and sets about finding his wife and this man. He tracks them down and confronts the man whom he promptly stabs, leaving him fatally wounded. At the trial he blames the general public for not buying electronics from the company he worked for, and says that the closure of the firm sent him into a spiral of events that eventually led him here. He was sentenced to life imprisonment at the expense of the taxpayer.

What a sorry state of affairs. The only person who seemed to constantly be picking up the bill here was the poor taxpayer, who you will remember, is the consumer as well. If the consumer had concentrated on being a consumer instead of interfering in politics (the environment) then he would not have been called upon as a taxpayer!

Taxpayers should stick to being taxpayers and let the government sort out the tricky stuff, whilst the

consumer should concentrate on buying stuff. It's that simple. The government will let you know if it needs your input on anything.

As a consumer, you could be held responsible for the man who killed his love rival and were lucky not to be put on trial as an accessory. Let that be a lesson to you. The world's foremost experts in environmental packaging are on the case (no pun intended), and will have worked out how to make packaging out of thin air very soon. Meanwhile don't be alarmed. Keep buying. Lots of love, your government.

Fantastic. It's so nice I don't have to worry about anything. In fact, as a consumer, I don't. I won't stop buying for anybody. You gave me the green light to buy, so you worry about the environmental repercussions. I wanted a tv. I bought a tv. I don't need the packaging, so I throw it away. Big deal.

Except it is a big deal. To make cardboard requires wood, same as paper, and you know where wood comes from. That's it. Trees. Now, I'm no tree hugging environmentalist, but I can see that there's a problem. Trees are vital for the survival of this planet, and we keep cutting them down. No more trees. No more planet. Simple.

So would I trade all my packaging for a more sustainable environment? Ha! Don't make me laugh! That's what recycling was brought in for. To keep the world running at the unsustainable pace it's running at, and try to keep up by using packaging again.

Sorry, I've just had a crazy idea, why not use less packaging, by buying less stuff, or in fact, if you want something so badly, go and pick it up from the factory with no packaging. Would you? Of course not.

Most stuff needs packaging because it has been container freighted from a factory on the other side of the world to "save money." If you fancy going to china to pick up your tv, then maybe you could do without packaging, but hang on, you'd have to put it on the plane, and they wouldn't let you on without ample packaging. So back to square one!

We need to package products to make sure they don't break before they're delivered, because if they break, you'll want a refund or replacement, and that costs money. Too many refunds and the company will go under, and you saw what happened to the man who lost his job in the previous paragraph. Surely you don't want that on your conscience, do you?

It's a tough question, this one of packaging, although it seems so easy. Buy less, and you won't need so much packaging. But our world now relies on people buying stuff, that being the reason we are all so comfortable here in the west. We sell a lot of stuff and we make a lot of money. That lot of money gives us and our employees a nice life, and the tax dollars go back into the community to help urban regeneration projects, education and health programs.

If we stopped buying stuff, the world would be a much darker place. Parks wouldn't be built, new highways wouldn't be created, civil engineering projects would be put on hold, there would be no more aid for the third world, people would starve in the poorest countries. People wouldn't be able to go on holiday anymore.

What do you think? Do you think the world as we know it is dependent on consumers buying stuff, and is therefore also dependent on packaging to put all the stuff in? Governments also buy stuff, but where do they get their money from? That's right, the good old consumer. Oh, that's you and me by the way. So I guess that gives us a lot of say in the matter if we want to ensure that the whole world isn't reduced to recycled cardboard and paper. You may be able to recycle it but you can't turn it into a tree again! Now that would be a cool magic trick. Unfortunately, once the tree has been cut, it cannot ever be reformed.

There are two ways we can look at this. One is to stop buying so much stuff, which would reduce the amount of packaging, and the other is to invest in a more sustainable form of packaging. Trials of different products have been looked at but nothing has actually been proposed to fully stop trees being used for packaging. Maybe you have an idea. Maybe you can invent something. Maybe you also know why people need so much stuff in the first place. But that's another topic!

Recyclable products are a good thing. It is a positive step. We need to encourage all of our neighbouring countries to recycle too, if they don't already, but we also need to identify the biggest culprits in packaging – those products that are used by the most number of people and have the potential to become landfill and litter.

Although electronic goods do use large cardboard packets, we tend to only buy a new tv every five or six years I would guess, whereas we may drink two or three bottles of soft drinks a day, maybe even more in

summer. What happens to them? What material are they made from? Are they recyclable?

Plastics

1. *Generic name for certain synthetic or semi synthetic materials that can be moulded or extruded into objects or films or filaments or used for making e.g. coatings and adhesives*

Plastic was a great invention wasn't it? I mean that in all sincerity. Derived from oil, it is durable, flexible, doesn't rust and is strong, but lightweight. A truly ingenious invention. You name it, and it's made from plastic. Bottles, plates, bags, cups, toilet seats, mobile phones. There are numerous industrial applications. Plastic has been around for many years and is here to stay.

It gets a bad name from the number of plastic items that wash up on the world's beaches, but that isn't the plastics fault. It was built to last, and last it does. As usual, the problem arises when humans get involved. Humans are the ones responsible for the bottles and plastic bags on the beaches, and in fact all over the world, but it's nice to blame an inanimate object.

Although plastic bottles are a scourge everywhere, I decided to look at the life cycle of some plastic products to see whether the resulting environmental pollution was in fact warranted. I decided to pick a soft drink as my example.

Water, additives, labour, electricity are needed to make the soft drink. The drink is bottled in plastic and distributed using labour, fuel, and electricity. It is then stored using electricity and labour before being distributed to retailers, who in turn store it in a fridge, using electricity and labour to stock up the fridge. The thirsty customer comes in, hands over his money and opens the drink. It takes less than a minute before he finishes it and tosses it into the bin (or not, as the case may be) resulting in environmental pollution. Now someone has to think about what to do with the bottle. Someone has to empty the bin, sort the rubbish, and get it to a recycling plant where it will be turned into a ????

I don't know if it's just me, but can anyone else see that this is a complete waste of time? Wouldn't it be better to cut the whole process out and not make the soft drink in the first place? These drinks are not beneficial to the system, so why make them?

"Because they taste good," say you, "who are you to tell us what we should or shouldn't drink?"

And you'd be right of course, but if you stop and think for a moment. I mean really stop and think for a moment. What are the positive outcomes of drinking a cola drink? Refreshment? Try water or juice! The artificial flavour is what we love. The same as all the other processed foods we buy on the street, whose packaging, incidentally also usually contain plastics, and will also not biodegrade. Why is it that the food and drink we buy which is not good for our system, is also not good for the environment? Maybe there's the link we need right there!

The idea that we bottle water is also a little crazy as well, although people would say they have a right to have bottled water. You see, whatever reason I give for not doing something, you will always have a counter argument ready! Why do you think that is? What are you protecting – the soft drinks industry? Or maybe it is your brain addicted to artificial sweeteners and flavourings doing its best to hang on to the stuff it loves.

People talk about being addicted to alcohol, but these fizzy soft drinks are much worse. They contain so many unnatural ingredients yet we love them. We crave them. Tap water! No thanks, I'll have a sparkling drink. Tap water isn't cool, but natural spring water is. The only problem is, it may be "good" for you, but it's still in a plastic bottle, and someone's got to do something with it after you've finished it. Just because you put it in a recycling bin doesn't excuse you from your responsibilities.

Imagine how many plastic containers you would have in your house if you had to keep all the plastic bottles you have used over your life? From drinks to multi-surface spray. Think how much plastic you have accumulated that someone else has to get rid of!

I noticed how much I was using, and I started to use a simple measure. If the container was a plastic single use type I just wouldn't buy the product. That included confectionery, soft drinks, or bottled water. The same applied to packaging around fast food. I just stopped eating it. I just stopped going to takeaway restaurants. If I couldn't eat it on the premises I just wouldn't eat it. I extended this vow (*Make a vow; promise*) to all paper and polystyrene takeaway food and drink products. The net result is that I am much

healthier (and wealthier)!

No longer do I drink or eat products that are pre-packaged and pre-processed. I extended this vow to supermarket food as well, which meant that if I didn't cook it from the raw ingredients (which were sometimes packaged in plastic) I didn't buy it. Net result. I am eating healthier food as well. Although (due to travelling in many parts of the world at the moment) I am finding it very hard to achieve this, but I will keep going with it.

Can you start to see the link forming between packaging, consumer waste and health?

Anything that is made in a factory never has the same love as something made at home. The home product has none of the packaging, and also has none of the industrial ingredients, but contains a lot of love. Home made anything. Toys. Food. Drinks. Clothes. Cards.

Made-at-home products don't tend to need industrial strength packaging, because they don't have to travel far to their destination.

In our reliance on companies to provide us with everything we need and want, we have started to lose traditional skills and creativity. Things that not only shouldn't be lost, but should be expanded upon (more in other chapters). Handing over control to someone else isn't progress, it's just a form of laziness. It's not through lack of ability either. Man has proved again and again that he is a species that can turn his hand to any task, but machine-made isn't the same as hand-made.

I am not suggesting you give up buying products from companies and make everything yourself, but I think that a return to individual products as opposed to mass market products will be a definite improvement. There is money to be made in creating products with love that are in tune with the natural environment, I assure you. People are always prepared to pay more for products that are hand-made as opposed to machine-made. You can control the packaging. You can be environmentally aware of the effect your product will have on the environment (if any). Think about it. Now is a great time to start thinking, not about mass production, but about individual hand crafted products.

There is real beauty in the workmanship of the hand
and only dull conformity in the mass produced

This is one way we can reduce the impact humans are having on the earth, whilst still maintaining a decent income, and being more individually creative. And perhaps at last, we will stop using products that are harmful to our health, the environment; and products that are so global, they alter the eating and drinking habits of entire nations, through cleverly manipulated marketing campaigns.

Ultimately you will make up your own mind – that's not for me to influence. But think carefully about what we have talked about here, and monitor your own use of packaged products and note what benefit each of them have on the system as a whole. If it doesn't benefit us or the planet then stop using it. By benefit, I don't mean satisfy a craving or addiction!

The less packaged products we all use, the more the world will start to move into a more peaceful phase. Home grown (or local), home cooked products have love. You don't need to tell the carrots you love them; it's all built in!

Machines, and that includes hens, locked up and forced to lay eggs, or dairy cows who have pumps attached to their udders for hours on end, do not love what they do. Their work is forced labour and as such it makes sense that there will be little positive energy in the output.

Buying unpackaged products seems to be the way forward. You can't make processed foods if you've got nothing to package them in! You can't transport goods tens of thousands of kilometres if you've got nothing to protect them with. It means that products start to move back to local producers where packaging is minimal, and only to avoid breakages.

This may herald a new era of individual products where local (and regional) people can minimize the environmental impact, whilst still offering exciting and new products for the consumer. This is something I will be starting right away. Just because it's local, doesn't mean it has to be boring! Unlock your creativity.

Unpackage your life!

[Back to Index](#)

Relationships

1. *A relation between people; ('relationship' is often used where 'relation' would serve, as in 'the relationship between inflation and unemployment', but the preferred usage of 'relationship' is for human relations or states of relatedness)*
2. *A state of connectedness between people (especially an emotional connection)*
3. *A state involving mutual dealings between people or parties or countries*
4. *(anthropology) Relatedness or connection by blood or marriage or adoption*

We all hear talk about relationships all the time, we may even be in one; and if we are having trouble with our “relationship,” we can always go and see a counsellor or buy a self-help book. The dictionary defines relationship in several ways but all the definitions talk about relationship being between humans. “A state of connectedness” they write, but in this topic I would like to explore this more deeply with you. The relationship I would like to begin with on our journey has nothing to do with humans per se, but affects us all in the most profound way, without us even realising it.

The sun, the moon and the earth

We have all heard the term “lunatic” being bandied about for someone of “unsound mind” who needs constant supervision, but the term comes from “luna” (latin for moon) and originally indicated someone insane, who was believed to be affected by the phases of the moon. But after numerous scientific experiments, they have found no evidence that the moon causes this effect. But dogs howl at the full moon and people often report strange goings on, so maybe there is something in it, but we mustn't speculate!

What we must examine, is the relationship we are in with the universe, but let us first look at the relationship between the planets in our solar system.

All of us have learnt that the earth is the third planet from the sun, and moves around it every 365 days (the length of our calendar year), and the moon moves around the earth every 28 days or so. The earth also spins on its own axis (23.5 degree tilt) and makes a full rotation once every 24 hours (the length of our earth day). When we are facing the sun it is light and when we are facing away from the sun it is dark! With me so far?

We also have eight other planets in our solar system. Mercury (the closest to the sun), jupiter, venus, saturn, uranus, mars, neptune, and pluto (the furthest from the sun, taking many years to move around it to make one complete rotation), and all of them quietly obey the laws of nature, without giving a second thought to “am I on the correct path?” or “should I speed up or slow down.” They just sit in their assigned place, held on to by gravity, that strange and wonderful force that stops us all from flying around.

And day after day, year after year, century after century, millennia after millennia the relationships stay intact (sorry about the science lesson).

Our sun, the bringer of light and life to our planet emits a solar wind which contains plasma from the sun, and we are protected from the harmful particles by the magnetosphere (*The magnetic field of a planet; the volume around the planet in which charged particles are subject more to the planet's magnetic field than to the solar magnetic field*), and we can see these particles colliding with the earth nearest the poles, the so called “aurora borealis,” or northern lights (and the corresponding southern polar lights), which gives an eerie green or red shimmer to the sky, like curtains blowing in the wind, looking almost supernatural or like a special effect from a film.

So we could say that our planet's magnetic fields are in a relationship with the solar wind. Do you agree? Ok, so let's move on.....

The menstrual cycle

The time of the month, a period, her monthlies; there are many expressions for a woman's menstrual cycle (*a recurring cycle (beginning at menarche and ending at menopause) in which the endometrial lining of the uterus prepares for pregnancy; if pregnancy does not occur the lining is shed at menstruation*), and it is marked by mood changes, tension, stomach cramps, cravings for certain foods etc.

Some women have an easy time of it, but in my experience many do not; and it is usually the men in the physical relationship that suffer (sorry ladies, I know you suffer more!). You see, men can't understand why someone who was normal one minute, is crying the next, or angry, or complaining of a stomach ache – it doesn't happen to us. So we say “Jeez, why are you crying?” or “Why are you so moody!” Men! We don't understand anything do we?

But strangely (or naturally), the woman's menstrual cycle is almost exactly the same as the cycle of the

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

moon. We could normally pass this off as just coincidence except we have a lot of evidence that the tides are controlled by the moon's influence on the earth through something called tidal force. So I think that somewhere down the line we have to accept that there are forces acting, not only on the planet, but on humans at a level we cannot comprehend through mere thought alone.

One other interesting thing I found out from one of my friends, was that when she was having her period, her two closest friends had theirs at the exact same time, even though they weren't living in the same house!

So the sun is in a relationship with the earth, and all other planets in our solar system; the moon is in relationship with the earth, and women's menstrual cycles and the tides are in relationship with the moon.

"All very interesting," you might say, "but what has this got to do with this topic? We're not here for a science lesson, we could get a book at the library if we wanted to find this stuff out! What's your point?"

The seasons

Spring, summer, autumn, winter. The four seasons. In the cycle of nature we could say that spring represents birth, and winter represents death, but this is not a philosophical discussion. We are talking about the cycle of life in real terms. The rhythm of life. The cyclical nature of everything.

In winter, everything dies back in the ground, but come spring, everything comes alive again. Year in, year out. But there is nothing magical about this, nor superstitious, it is a natural process controlled by our friend in relationship, the sun.

Earlier, we mentioned that the earth rotates on its "axis" which is always at an angle of 23.5 degrees to the sun, so winter in the northern hemisphere means that the earth is farther away from the sun; and conversely, the southern hemisphere is closer to the sun, so they have what we call summer. As the earth moves round the sun on its 365 day voyage, the northern hemisphere becomes closer to the sun, thanks to the angle of the axis, bringing spring and then summer, and the southern hemisphere moves further away, bringing, you guessed it, autumn and then winter! So far so good.

We plant our crops in the spring and harvest them in summer and autumn so we have plenty of food for the winter. It all seems logical, doesn't it?

So the relationship we have with the sun directly affects all growing cycles depending on whether we are closer or further away. If the earth's axis was straight, we would have continual summer as we do at the equator. Ok, let's recap:

We have said that all planets in the solar system are in relationship with each other. They are also in a relationship with the sun. We are in relationship with all the other planets and we have a relationship with the sun that affects temperature and growing cycles of plants and vegetables etc. all controlled by the position of the earth's axis. We also have a relationship with the moon, which affects tides, and women's menstrual cycles, (and makes dogs howl). So what have we learnt?

I would say that it is quite clear that *everything* is in relationship. There cannot be a winter without summer, and there cannot be a north without a south. Are we in agreement?

A fine balance

It seems that although there is nothing to show what we are physically in relationship with everything (as we have no wedding ring), there is order, and there is relationship in everything we are and everything we do, controlled by forces we cannot see.

Unfortunately, lots of people believe that this could not be possible without a creator, someone who had come up with all of this, but that is because we are using thought which is limited and believe that the universe was created by someone using thought. So we try and we try to understand it, and we investigate it with our science, but we never really get to the eternal question "Why?"

And I'll give you one reason why we can't understand it. Thought. A process created in the mind by memory and experience and conditioning and knowledge, all of which is limited because it is past. So for now let's not try to understand how this relationship was created as we will only frustrate ourselves!

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

It is interesting to note that thanks to just an 23.5 degree angle we can have scorching hot summers and ice cold winters, which is why we have to respect the fine balance the world is in with the sun, yet we do all we can to get the better of nature using thought, which can never be intelligence.

We are so damned clever, aren't we? We think we know everything there is to know. And so we career through life, testing nuclear bombs, dredging the sea, digging up the entire planet for our consumer needs, polluting the atmosphere, knocking down huge areas of rainforest, polluting the rivers and the oceans, and we haven't even started talking about the relationship between Man and the animals, and Man and Man. But do we have to?

If we can see that there is something invisible that can control the tides, women's menstrual cycles, summer and winter, then we must accept that there is something we cannot "see" that is affecting all of us. But we shouldn't be surprised, after all, we are all made of the same stuff. We are all part of the whole, the universe, and each other.

So next time you think about diverting a river, blowing up your neighbour, destroying ancient forests, punching someone in the face you don't like, or getting angry at your partner for complaining about stomach cramps, remember everything is a part of you, and that the whole world is kept in balance by an invisible relationship and a mere 23.5 degrees of tilt. How can we think that we can keep going the way we are, without something in the relationship changing? 23.5 degrees – the angle that keeps everything just so. That the summer comes every year and so does the winter; that the cycle of life is maintained.

If we think that relationship just means that two individuals who are spending time with each other, or living together, then we really know nothing. But I am sure you see it now. Everything in relationship. And remember – 23.5 degrees.

What would happen if it changed? It probably doesn't bear thinking about.

Suddenly the selfish, greedy, angry lifestyles we lead would seem kind of insignificant compared to what would happen to the planet. Then again, maybe one day the snows will come and cover up all of Man's hatred and desire.

[Back to Index](#)

Religion

1. *A strong belief in a supernatural power or powers that control human destiny*
2. *An institution to express belief in a divine power*

Well, here it is, the day I have been dreading, has come. It has now come time to discuss religion with you. Why have I been dreading this day? Well you can criticize a man's clothes, his home, his government even his wife, but on no accounts criticize his religion or there'll be trouble.

But I don't want to criticise anybody, nor anything they believe in, I've said it right from the beginning of this book. What I do want to do, is explore the universe we live in, and our access to that universe – our minds.

If you choose to believe in islam, buddhism, christianity, hinduism, sikhism, or any other ism, who am I to criticise! You are a human being just like me, and you have the freedom in your mind to believe in anything you choose. If I criticise you, that is just me trying to say that I'm right and you're wrong, and the way I see it, there is no right and wrong, just personal opinion and insight.

So that's what's got me confused about this whole religion thing. Yes,. I can understand the desire to believe in something greater than oneself, it certainly does bring comfort where only fear existed before, and it is nice to think that there is a place after this life of misery, and desire, and greed, where people are all, well, just nice to each other.

I can understand why people talk about days of judgement and heaven and hell, because it does seem that some people manage to get away with doing some terrible things on this earth without having to face the consequences, and that people who do the right thing should be rewarded. All that, I *can* understand.

I also understand where the religious books talk about people not stealing from each other, not running off with other people's partners, not being greedy nor lazy, and not killing each other. All those seem to be pretty sensible.

In fact, I have to say that there are great words in the koran, the bible etc. and it seems like there are a lot of things that can be learnt from reading these books.

So all that being said, I have nothing against anyone that believes in god, in fact the people I have met, muslims, christians, hindus and buddhists seem to be some of the few people who actually have some values in life above just consumerism, and what "I" can get.

But. And there is a but, as I am sure you would expect.

Well, where do I begin? Let's start with talking about who is right and who is wrong. It seems that the christians have always said they are right, that the true word of god is in the bible. The muslims would disagree, and say that the true word of allah is only in the koran. And then of course, everyone fights about who's right and who's wrong.

Wars are started, hatred abounds, and millions of people die or suffer. For what? The ability to say: "See, I told you I was right," whilst standing over someone with a sword.

It makes no sense to me.

As someone who is trying to investigate the true nature of everything in seek of universal truth, I cannot for the life of me understand what is going on with everyone. Somebody many, many years ago, wrote down words that were supposed to be from god, and suddenly everyone is fighting over whose god is the best! Surely that cannot be true intelligence? Surely we are missing something somewhere?

No other books in the last few thousand years have sparked such a stir and carried on causing such misery and pain for everyone in the world.

I have already said they contain some interesting things, but that's all. Whether god the entity exists in the form we imagine him to be (in human form using language and thought), I have no idea. But as we have discussed in other topics, the idea that somehow there is a "person" behind all this is somewhat strange.

I have found throughout my journey that there is a whole, there is an indivisible, but would I call it god? No, why? That is a man-made word, a label for something that cannot be described by words alone, and definitely not come to through words alone – through insight, most definitely. But not by reading books and repeating what they say. Do you follow me?

You may think I am being blasphemous, but I think religion is all a bit too easy; the idea that you can find the eternal, the indivisible, or the whole, just through reading books someone else has written (whether or not they are the true words of the god who created the universe). Do you know what I mean?

If I was to read any of the great books such as the koran, and the bible, I would finish it, hungry for more, wanting to explore further; to investigate, not to wait until I die to find out. But so many people seem

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

satisfied that it is the word of god, and it is all that is to be known about the universe and nature. But we are told we must not question the word of god!

I cannot believe that god (when passing the words to the prophets) said explicitly: “Hey, and make sure you tell everyone that they are not to question any of this, ok?” Why would he do that, what purpose would there be in creating an intelligent life form with the power to question everything, but then limit him and say: “Yeah, but don't question what I say. Because this is everything you need to know. And if anyone else questions it, you must kill them!”

But I don't want people to question the texts. They are complete works. I want people to question the whole of life with their whole beings. I want them to question why a flower is a flower, why we can feel air but we can't see it, why we love, why we hate, why we are greedy. I want us to question ourselves so deeply that we discover something truly wonderful – not just read a book, attend a place of worship, listen to a sermon or two and then go about your daily business of making money, being unkind to people and planning a war with countries of unbelievers! Do you understand what I am trying to convey to you?

How many of you talk about your “spiritual life” as something external to everything that you are. All that does is cause more division of the self. If there is a “spiritual life” then live it as part of the whole, not as a bolt-on, as in “my personal life,” or “my business life,” as if there is more than one of you.

Power and division

We are all whole, we are all one, yet we divide ourselves into so many compartments, don't you think? And if you think we are divided by colour and race or country, how divided do you think we have become through religion?

I am a muslim. And so we divide. I am a christian. And so we divide.

But the people in charge of the religions kind of like it. In fact, they are almost the same as the political leaders, and in fact in some countries, east and west, the head of the church and the head of the government are the very same person, which makes some of the decisions they make all the more questionable.

You only have to look at the followers of religions worldwide, including the so called “peaceful” religions like buddhism, to see how much power these religious leaders emanate. Unfortunately, power and religion go hand in hand, and we have seen, over many centuries, the crimes against humanity which have been carried out by these people in the name of religion.

So who are these powerful men of god who get other men to do their bidding, and kill others on behalf of god? Well as you probably guessed it, they are primarily men. What a surprise. Men trying to control everyone else. I think it is fair to say that we don't see many women at the head of most religions. So forgive me when I say I think that when we talk of powerful religious leaders we are talking about powerful men. Except they do not dominate in the name of the country, the nation they dominate in the name of god.

Why else would women have to cover themselves at the vatican, or muslim women have to cover themselves in public, and in some parts of the world, can only be seen by their husbands!

What is this? This is not the whole, this is men trying to enslave women as they have tried to do since the beginning. This is man trying to force women to be subservient to him. Don't you find it strange that something which is the omnipresent creator of the universe turns out to be a “He?”

Don't you think god would be something which could not be described by words, something which is unattainable by human thought alone.

Men!

Everywhere I look, I see men in positions of power and women trying desperately to be as powerful, but power is a sickness and it corrupts all that it touches. It is present everywhere in our society, and religion is no exception. Maybe it is something inherent in the nature of a man to want to be the controller of the universe, maybe it is because we are conditioned to be that way by our parents, and our leaders, and educators, maybe it is just because we have bigger muscles than women, who knows?

All I know is, that as soon as Man stopped interacting with nature – as the rest of the universe does – and started worshipping gods, men saw an opportunity to control everyone else (women especially), and he made sacrifices to these gods in order to appease them – such as sacrificing a woman to the sun god so there would be a good harvest. What nonsense is this?

And just as the governments have created huge towering institutions, so the religions have too, and have used hard working people's money to build them.

How many people who have nothing still give to the church? How many of them donate their money so that powerful men can coat their temples in gold leaf, as an offering just in case the gods get angry? So what if they get angry, we are all going to die soon anyway. We will all return to the earth, and the earth is just another part of the whole.

We are told we must never cause offence to the gods and specific rules are put in place to ensure conformance or obedience. And woe betide anyone who falls foul of these rules.

Some people don't follow religions per se, instead they enlist the services of a guru (*a recognized leader in some field or of some movement*), and for signing up with the promise to follow them, they will instruct the follower in the "spiritual." But more often than not, these gurus are men, or at least powerful people who charge vast sums of money to the desperate and the fearful.

But why do we follow these people? Can we not investigate the nature of all things with our own minds? Or are we just too busy acquiring material wealth houses and possessions to bother. Is that why we follow gurus who promise us access to the eternal for just a few gold coins? Or are we perhaps trying to reduce the guilt we feel for all the greed and suffering we have caused ourselves and our fellow man?

Whatever the truth of it, all there is one thing certain. In each religion there is a hierarchy to be followed, just like in business or politics. Except, instead of the managing director at the head, you may have, for example, the pope. But never forget that this is a power structure like all others. It requires you to obey the rules (praying five times a day for example).

But we are so desperate to escape the life we have created, that we will do anything for salvation.

"We want to be saved," we cry.

"Sure, just sign up here," the leaders say, "and everything will be fine."

But what happens to people who don't sign up for these religions? What happens to them when they die? They have not recited the bible or the koran, nor any other scripture. They have been compassionate and loving for their whole lives. They have shown nature respect, and they have been free from greed and envy. What happens to them? Do they still get the preferential treatment or is that it for them?

Have they blown their chances by not going to church every day, nor fasting at lent, nor reading from texts? Does god really stand judging everyone at the gate? Is he (there we go with that he again) a creator of all things, yet still has the human frailty of judging everyone he meets? Is he not compassion? Is he not love? Is he not the eternal?

I think we all need to start asking ourselves some serious questions. We owe it to ourselves. And let's face it, without the big brain we have, we would not even be able to ponder these questions. Without the huge brain, we would not be able to read, or have thoughts about god. Where would we be then? What would we do on the day of judgement?

Do animals go to heaven?

In fact, here we are talk, talk, talking, about Man all the time, and I clean forgot about the animals, the birds, the fish, the insects, and the microbes. What happens to them? They have no power of thought, and certainly no reading powers, nor praying powers, but they are born and die just like us. They are part of the whole, the indivisible, the universe, but they have no access via words to it.

What happens to them? Are they not part of this life? Do they not give up their lives so we can eat? Surely they deserve a say in the matter?

Some religions think that if you do badly in your life then you are reincarnated as an animal, but surely that is showing some disrespect to the animals! They do nothing wrong on this planet. They keep it in perfect balance. But then we mustn't forget that Man thinks he is the greatest thing in the universe (I'd like to see some evidence), so of course, everything here is for Man's use and abuse (including women).

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Try hard as I might to empathise with you on the subject of religion, I find myself keeping coming back to the thought that religion is just another form of control, and actually has nothing to do with helping people find out if there is something more than this world we inhabit. Somehow, the access to the eternal seems all too easy. Follow a little rule here. Give a little money there. Read a book here. Pray a bit there.

Things this complex are not as easy as that. I have spent the last few years engaged in a search for truth and although some of you may offer to lend me your scriptures to help me along the way, I have come to realise that truth is only discoverable for yourself. No one can tell you truth. You must find out for yourself.

So in closing this topic, I would like to offer all of you my love and compassion, and hope I have not offended your minds too much, but ask only one thing of you. Will you sit with me a moment? Will you share yourself? Will you join with me in a dialogue for one minute in search of truth? Will you put down your religious books and just sit for a while, and we will engage in a dialogue of silence? For in the silence there comes great wisdom.

Let us have it now. A dialogue in silence.

[Back to Index](#)

Respect

1. *The condition of being honoured (esteemed or respected or well regarded)*
2. *A courteous expression (by word or deed) of esteem or regard*
3. *Behaviour intended to please your parents*
4. *A feeling of friendship and esteem*
5. *Courteous regard for people's feelings*

Do you respect me? I want you to respect me. I don't want to earn your respect. I just want respect. Do you know who I am? How dare you not show me some respect. I am the great, the one and only, alan orr. You must respect me. Blah, blah, blah.

Ok, so it's nice to be respected – to be held in high esteem by your peers, isn't it? It makes you feel nice, there's nothing wrong with that. So who do we respect, what types of people do we respect? What do they do? What have they achieved? Think about this carefully for a moment, because it is of the utmost importance.

What I want to explore with you here in this topic is whether we pay respect to people just because they wear specific clothes, have reached a high position in society, or just because they threaten us to get it! Surely respect is just a measure of what you have done, and not who you are as a human being. What do you think?

In most countries, the king or queen is held in high esteem. People wave flags, they sing the national anthem, and in some places, even mentioning a bad word against them is a treasonable offence. Monks are respected for the robes they wear, soldiers are respected for the uniform they wear, presidents, prime ministers are respected for the office they hold, chief executives are respected for their job title, wealthy people are respected for the amount of money they have.

So what about you and me. Who respects us?

I have noticed in life, that many people demand respect from us. First our parents. They want our respect and they will get it! But why do parents want this from their children? Does it make them feel good, powerful, or important; does it give them the respect they always craved and never received? Surely it's a pretty sad way to get people to hold you in high esteem, don't you think? If the only person you can get to respect you is your children, and only because you intimidate them and they rely on you, what does that say about you as a person?

The same goes for people in any position of authority. Lawyers, judges, magistrates, or police. These are very important people, don't you know! Except strip away the clothes and there is, but a man underneath. That doesn't mean he is worthless without his title and clothes, for he is still part of the most intelligent species on the planet – homo sapiens.

The thing we all seem to forget is that underneath our clothes we are all the same. Clothes and titles are like a second skin we put on before we leave home in the morning. They may be part of us, but they are definitely not us. Not our authentic self, not our true self.

Imagine for a moment you line up a group of people next to each other wearing their second skins. A king, a judge, a politician, a chief executive, a priest, and a soldier. Then put an alcoholic, a murderer, and a wife beater next to them. Now tell them to strip their clothes off. Who do you respect now? Where are the visual clues you need to tell you when to respect someone and when to despise them? You may look at the faces to look for airs of authority, but what's to tell you you're not wrong? After all, there are many people in high positions who are also wife beaters and alcoholics, and being in a high position does not preclude you from being a murderer!

Underneath our clothes we are all the same – human

Let's try to get inside the minds of the people we have just undressed for a moment. What are they thinking as they are asked to undress. How do they feel? Who has the most to lose by undressing? Does the murderer care if he takes off his clothes? After all, no one respects him anyway. He is despised and reviled by all in society. What about the king? His whole rule is based on outward displays of grandeur. How would he feel? What would be going through his mind as he stood next to the murderer? Wouldn't he be thinking, "I hope no one thinks I'm the murderer. Don't they know I'm the king. I am the most important person in society."

But naked, they have all been exposed. They are revealing their true selves, albeit unwillingly. For a man (or woman), undressing in public is highly embarrassing – it demeans and it devalues, at least in the minds of those who are asked to strip off. It seems that after millions of years of evolution, we are actually afraid to

show off our own bodies! Imagine animals being afraid of showing off their bodies.

A short while ago, I was in the bathroom, when I noticed a small spider busily spinning its web. As I stood watching it I wondered whether it had any delusions of grandeur, whether it needed respect, whether it compared itself to other spiders to see who was more important and worthy of respect; but as I watched, I had to concede that all the spider was interested in was spinning its web. You may think that this is a silly example, as a spider is a simple creature, and that we are a technologically and socially advanced civilisation. But I reiterate: only when we are wearing the clothes. Underneath, we are timid creatures, afraid to show the world who we really are. We project an image of who we want the world to think we are.

Let's face it, we are attached to the clothes, we are attached to the office, we are attached to the power, and we are attached to the respect. When we lose the clothes, the rest crumbles of its own volition.

So who are we without this respect? I mean, really? Are we all we seem? Or are we, as I suspect, filled with fear, afraid to be alone in the world, with a desperate need to be liked and admired, so we do not feel empty. Are we perhaps afraid of ourselves, afraid that when we lose the cloak of power and respect we see ourselves for who we really are?

Self-respect

1. *The quality of being worthy of esteem or respect*

Do we need to have done anything to respect ourselves? Do we need to be an "important" man or hold an "important" position, or can anyone do it? This is the key to respect that most people miss. They think that by wearing the cloak of office (whichever that may be, from a father of children to the king), that the cloak somehow endows them with self-respect as well. That, unfortunately, is not the case.

So how do we get this self-respect, where can we buy it? How much does it cost? What job do I have to do to get it?

As you all know, you can't get it from anywhere else apart from yourself. So where do you look? Nowhere, it's already there. It's already inside, just waiting for you to activate it. It requires no job titles, no funny robes, you can even get it while you're naked.

Stand in front of a mirror and tell yourself: "I respect myself. I value myself. I am worthy of myself. I need no external validation." There you go, done it! How does that feel?

I am guessing it doesn't feel as good as being the president, a senior judge, or a monk.

Who will respect you just because you respect yourself you may be wondering? Everybody or nobody? When you value yourself you have no pretensions about other people. You do not need to wear the robes (real or invisible), to feel important. Do you want to know why? Because you are important. You are alive, part of the human race, part of the earth and the solar system beyond.

You made it!

Out of all the things that could have gone wrong during the pregnancy and your subsequent birth, you were born. You breathed earth's air and *lived*. You are still alive today.

Whether you wear the cloak of office is not important, it is how you live your life that is. The only way is to live it authentically. To integrate (*make into a whole or make part of a whole*) yourself. To match the real you with the external you, the you you project to the outside.

All too often we hide our true selves from the rest of the world lest they laugh or make fun of us or don't respect us, but once you realise that their respect is actually not worth anything, you can begin to show yourself to the world. Not the person you think *they* want to see, but the person you really *are*.

People may show you respect, but you do not need it. Any time you start to get delusions of grandeur, just remember who you are without your clothes! Whether you have done great humanitarian work, saved the whales, or saved the world, it does not mean you need to be shown respect, do you understand? All that is happening is that the respect is pandering to your ego (*an inflated feeling of pride in your superiority to others*). You feel *important*. But remember what we said earlier in the discussion, you are important, but so are the words you use and the actions you take.

Take the first step in dismantling this falseness that is respect. Toss away the symbols of respect, the invisible (or visible) robes, and walk as naked through life as if you had just been born. Value yourself as a

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

human, not a position, and in valuing yourself, let the authentic you shine through like a golden light, through the armour you have built up over the years, and at the same time, let the light in. Once you have told yourself that you value yourself you do not need to keep doing it. You do not need any external validation, it doesn't matter what people think of you.

Remember this: One day they may offer you respect as their king, the next they want to cut off your head! External respect is transient. Self-respect will stay with you for as long as you live, all you have to do is let compassion and love be your guide in life.

[Back to Index](#)

Revenge

1. *Action taken in return for an injury or offence*
2. *Take revenge for a perceived wrong*

I was listening to the broadcast of the trial of a well known dictator and murderer, last week, where he was sentenced to death by hanging for the crimes he committed. One of the spectators was asked whether he thought it was a good thing he was being hanged, and he said:

“Hanging is too good for him, he deserves much worse than that”

I thought this was interesting. I would have thought that seeing someone's life extinguished by breaking their neck by hanging, would normally be sufficient punishment; after all, in legal terms, it is the ultimate punishment. Death (*the event of dying or departure from life*). So I thought to myself: “Why is death not enough?” It can only be one thing: Revenge.

If someone rapes or murders your child, or someone close to you, how would you feel? Hurt, depressed, angry, shocked? Yes, but if you could get hold of the person who hurt the one you love, what would you do to them in the moment? Beat them, stab them, strangle them, or hurt them so much so they would know how much you hurt at the loss of your close family member?

Even violent gangsters, who may regularly murder rivals, feel such grief, hurt, anger at losing one of their own loved ones. They vow to find out who did it, promise to torture them, make them suffer, then kill them and their whole family.

Let's face it, revenge makes you feel better doesn't it? And certain religious texts condone it as well. So why not? Someone takes away the thing you cherish the most, and you hurt and suffer terribly at your loss. So you decide to deal with the hurt and suffering you feel, by doing exactly the same as the person did to your loved one, to them; and normally you want to make them suffer more – just for putting you through all this.

*I want revenge!
I will take my revenge!
We'll get our revenge!*

Let me ask you. When you take your revenge, how do you feel? Well, much better I would suppose. You have righted a wrong, done to *you*, and that's the end of it. They murder someone you love, you murder someone they love.

I would call this hurt transference. You feel hurt so you want someone else to feel exactly the way you do, and revenge covers this quite nicely, thank you. So in essence, revenge is just away of dealing with hurt emotions, that's all.

Even the most peaceful, non-violent man, who hears his ten year old daughter has been raped and murdered, feels revenge boiling inside him. He'll hurt the man who hurt his daughter, he'll make him pay. And believe me, revenge is a very real emotion. It sits just beside hurt.

It's not hate, it's not aggression, it is a one-off, an emotion brought to the surface for one time only – to take action, in return for a specific offence (“He slept with my wife.” “She hurt my feelings.” “He destroyed my career.” “She ran off with my friend.” “He cheated me out of money.”), although the action taken may be disproportionate for the offence caused. “He slept with my wife, so I killed him.”

This is revenge (not for the offence committed), but for the emotion generated, and that emotion is hurt (*psychological suffering, cause emotional anguish or make miserable*).

Even aggressive, violent people feel hurt. They are not immune. Hurt is one of the strongest emotions in humans, generated typically by feelings of loss or betrayal, usually something that another human being has done to them or is perceived to have done. “I lost my business and my wife because of him. He's going to pay.” And when someone says “he's going to pay” they do not generally mean financially, because once hurt has been unleashed it stirs a feeling unmatched by any other, especially if the perceived cause was someone in a position of trust like a friend.

Let's look at this closely.

If someone breaches your trust you feel hurt, and if you also have lost something you value or love you will feel hurt plus anger, and that begins to generate feelings of revenge. You want to show the person who hurt your feelings how hurt you are that they hurt yours, and in order to do that you have to hurt them! Does

that make sense?

“My daughter was killed by a drunk driver, I want him to suffer as much as she did.”

I'm sure you've heard that on the news. The father sobbing violently, his anger almost uncontrollable. He has just heard the news that the man will get off with a two year ban and a large fine, but no prison term, and he just can't bear the news. “It's too lenient. My daughter is dead. In a couple of years, that man will be back on the roads, but my daughter will still be dead.”

He's not thinking about how his daughter felt at the exact violent moment when the car struck her, throwing her body into the air and crushing her bones, but more how he feels. It is *his* loss. He is grieving for himself, not her, even though she is the one who is dead! He feels hurt that he has lost someone he loves. It is he who feels sorry for himself. He is hurt and someone must pay. But think of this.

If the man had been sentenced to ten or twenty years, would that be enough for the father out to avenge the death of his daughter? I don't think it would be; in the same way the spectator said that hanging was too good for the dictator. Even death was not enough.

I think what we want, is to inflict suffering on the person. Not just a prison sentence or death, but unlimited suffering determined only by *us*, by how much hurt *we* feel, until we don't feel hurt anymore. That's why the man, who wants to make someone suffer in revenge, would not kill him instantly with a bullet. With a bullet, there is no “cleansing of emotions.” He would rather torture him and kill him slowly with a knife, while he begged for his life.

No one can put a limit on how much suffering is enough to satisfy revenge, it is purely subjective. The suffering of the person who caused the loss is directly related to how much suffering and hurt the person taking revenge feels. That is why hanging is not enough, a bullet too quick, and twenty years not long enough.

So how do I transcend this feeling of hurt, and reach forgiveness – but miss out the act of revenge?

Forgiveness is only possible after the grieving period is over, whether your wife ran off with your best friend, or your child was murdered.

In the beginning, you cannot think of anything apart from how hurt you are, but consider that the very reason you are hurt is because of the love you felt for the person you have lost. This means that you can experience love, and if you can love, then you can forgive. Forgiveness is love.

You are showing that you can love the person who caused you pain. This is very hard for most people to come to terms with, but it is this very act of forgiveness that is responsible for allowing you to be at peace with yourself. If you cannot forgive, you will be stuck in the cycle of hurt, anger and revenge.

Hurt and anger are natural emotions to experience at the loss of a loved one, but the next action must be forgiveness. Remember, the person who was driving the car and killed your daughter, or murdered your child, or ran off with your wife, has to live with themselves for the rest of their lives. In forgiving them, you do not excuse their actions, but rather acknowledge that you feel hurt, and accept that this action was not directed at you personally and forgive them. You don't have to say it to their face, but if you say:

“I forgive you”

out loud, you not only show your capacity for love, but free yourself from being locked into a negative pattern of thinking your whole life. You see, the only alternative to forgiveness, is revenge, where you serve unlimited suffering on the person who caused offence.

But believe it or not, when you are standing in the court accused of murdering the man who murdered your daughter, his brother is now planning to avenge his brother's death by murdering you. And so the cycle of violence continues.

*He killed her.
I'll make him suffer.
I'll make him wish he wasn't born,
I'll make him pay!*

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

*I'll cut off his hands, one at a time,
Then his ears, one by one.
A leg, a foot an arm then his throat,
He'll wish he hadn't made me hurt.*

*Forgive him? Never!
He destroyed my life,
He raped and killed my only child.
The one I loved, the one I cherished,
I'd gladly hang, to see him die.*

[Back to Index](#)

Revolution

1. *A drastic and far-reaching change in ways of thinking and behaving*
2. *The overthrow of a government by those who are governed*
3. *A single complete turn (axial or orbital)*

Throughout history there have been many revolutions. In the main part they have been bloody affairs where many people have lost their lives and some have been caused by sheer people power with millions taking to the streets and demonstrating. They all want change. They want an improvement. Above all, they want someone different in power.

But all these revolutions have managed to effect, is the removal of one power. and the installation of another, and as many citizens have found out, the replacement government is sometimes no better than the first, and in many cases turn out to be worse. But hey, you win some, you lose some.

“We want freedom!” shout the people, as they tear down the symbols of power, the statues, and set fire to the institutions but once it's all over, once the mess has been cleared up, there is always someone still in power. That's just the way these things work after all.

You don't like what the government is doing, and so you set yourself up as the leader, organise yourself into a group, arm yourselves, and try to attract the support of the people. When the day comes you go in all guns blazing, proclaim that a “revolution” has taken place, stand waving to the crowds, and sit yourself quietly down in the old leader's chair. But nothing has really changed, only the names and faces of the powerful.

Pretty soon, you're up to the same tricks as the old lot, and the people are once again imprisoned by the powerful, waiting for the day when a new revolutionary leader comes along and offers you a better life. They don't need guns (although it helps), just the support of the people; and so a new revolution is started, and the new leaders are installed in power, and they sit themselves quietly down in the old leaders chair... Are you starting to see a pattern here?

And the wheel keeps turning

The other definition of revolution is (*a single complete turn (axial or orbital)*), and that's all these physical revolutions can do, they just turn the wheel. Can you see? But what I want to discuss with you here is not breaking the wheel, nor creating your own wheel, but jumping off it once and for all.

When I first started to get some insight into the world, I thought the only way to change things was to become an activist (*a militant reformer*), but then I started to realise that the word “reform” (*change for the better as a result of correcting abuses, A campaign aimed to correct abuses or malpractices, Self-improvement in behaviour or morals by abandoning some vice and even Produce by cracking or Break up the molecules of*), could not do anything to the wheel, except make it change shape – the wheel would still exist. We could make a wheel a square or a triangle but it would still, in essence, be the wheel!

So I got to thinking “How was it possible to have a revolution without a revolution? How could we not only change the shape of the wheel but leave it for good? How could we as a species leave the wheel turning without trying to change it, but have no part of it? I realised that the only real revolution could come from inside. Not by coming up with a new idea for how society and the world should be, that after all is just thought, and we can see where ideas, which is thought, have got us! Instead of trying to change everyone else (a mammoth task), why not change yourself, not at a superficial level, but right at the core?”

As I started this process I felt like my whole insides were being ripped apart, that everything I was and believed was being shredded into tiny pieces and it was a time of great confusion and conflict for me. How could everything that my parents told me, everything that society told me be an illusion. Why would my parents lie to me?

I started to think that maybe it was just me, maybe I was even having a nervous breakdown because it definitely felt like I was starting to lose my mind. Which funnily enough was happening, but not as the result of mental illness, but the result of having the curtains pulled up and reality starting to shine in brightly.

It was a time of terrible upset for my relationships, first with my wife, and then everyone else I knew. They thought I had gone mad! They just couldn't understand why I was changing. They liked the old me better they said; the one who would go out partying and liked laughing and joking. And here was me, angry, confused, drinking more and more to stop the conflict, arguing with everyone about why I was right and they were wrong. Let's put it this way, I was losing a lot more than I was gaining.

I started to wonder if all this was worth it? I suddenly wanted to be back to the old me, the one who just lived to have a good time, at whatever cost, but try as I might I couldn't go back. A process had started inside me I couldn't stop. I went to several psychologists who just said that perhaps I was going through some mid-life crisis, and that perhaps it was all to do with my father leaving when I was young, but I couldn't believe all that. They didn't have the answers I was seeking, so I had to go inside. And when I looked, I didn't like what I saw. Not one bit!

But as I tried to make sense of this new awareness, I started writing things down that I saw and felt. This book is the end of that process.

But the more I started to write, the more I started to realise that there was no one answer, that everything was intrinsically connected, and therefore could have no conclusions. That frustrated me more than you could ever imagine!

Maybe I just wasn't clever enough to see the answers, maybe the politicians and the scientists were the only ones that could provide the answers, but deep inside I knew they didn't have answers either; they were just playing their part on the "wheel of life." But I didn't want to just be "a cog on the wheel" as my dad put it, I wanted to be free of the whole wheel!

In the beginning I thought I could change the wheel, that I could affect it with my views and my opinions; but then as time went on, I realised it would merely accept my views or reject them and keep turning.

I was in turmoil. What would I do? What could I do? I could never go back to the way of life I had before. I had become socially isolated with my opinions and was becoming a complete bore at parties.

"Did you know that when we cut down a tree it..."

"Yeah whatever alan, have another drink!"

This went on for sometime until late last year (2007) I decided once and for all to jump. And so I did. I jumped off the wheel and was greeted with nothing. Not even darkness, or emptiness, just nothing. This disturbed me even more. How could there be nothing when I thought there was so much, and as I closed my eyes, I could see the wheel disappearing into the distance. Still silently turning as I floated. It was as if I was the spaceman ejected from the craft forced to watch it leave me forever alone (sorry for the imagery but I don't know how else to describe it).

"This isn't how it's supposed to be," I thought. "This isn't what I expected," and suddenly, I felt fear, a great fear I was now alone. Although I was still in society, and still had some of the same friends as I had before the process started, I felt very lonely. Who could I talk to about this now?

Maybe I needed to go to another retreat, or join a monastery, or get some psychological help, I just didn't know what to do. Maybe I should read some religious scriptures, or something to give me hope in the darkness, or talk to a monk or something?

But as quick as I had these thoughts, insight grabbed me by the balls and reminded me I had made the choice to jump off the wheel, and that although it was scary at first, once I accepted it and welcomed it, I would see that it was not dark nor empty, in fact it was the same place I had jumped off, I was just viewing it differently, but now I could really *see*.

I realised how foolish I had been when I was thinking about becoming an activist, standing around waving banners and campaigning for change, that is purely external. And although some groups manage to convince those in power to change laws or manage to save a few lives through external pressure, I could see this was still the wheel turning. The people in power didn't mind a bit of change too much. As long as the wheel was turning they would be safe.

But they would never think in a million years that anybody would jump off it. Why would anyone in their right mind jump? Surely they had too much to lose? But there was one thing they didn't know. I was in my right mind.

And the greatest thing about it? I didn't have to go anywhere I was still here.

Once you understand the wheel you'll be ready to jump off it forever.
It's time to jump, are you ready?

[Back to Index](#)

Running

1. *The act of running; travelling on foot at a fast pace*

I don't know if you've ever been for a run or a jog, but my dad started me off when I was young. I was never going to be the fastest in the world, but to this day I still run as often as I can. Don't worry if you've never done it before, running is natural; you don't need any special skills. You just need to start lifting your knees up alternately, and gently move slightly onto your toes. Put one foot in front of the other and then put the other foot in front of that one and so on. That's it! You're doing it. You're running!

You don't need any special clothes or equipment. You can run in anything, as long as it's comfortable. If you are going to buy anything, it's a pair of shoes, and that's it. Before all the medical profession start saying I am promoting something which you should be careful in doing if you are overweight or have a heart condition and that it's not good for your knees etc. I will just say I hope people exercise personal responsibility in everything they do, this being no exception.

So why is running good? We can go to gyms to get fit, even go on running machines and do aerobic classes, but nothing takes you back to your natural state quite like running can.

Humans evolved into great hunters, tracking prey for days to bring back food to their families, and we covered great distances looking for water. Unfortunately, modern culture has meant that the closest thing to hunting we do, is in the local supermarket for a breast of chicken in a white wine sauce, and maybe a bottle of chardonnay!

We lead stressful lives, working long hours, spending precious little time with our family and friends. We eat unhealthy food. We drink too much alcohol and smoke too many cigarettes. We spend too long in air-conditioned climates and polluted atmospheres – but there is a cure. Running. For all those people who are saying: “I could never run,” as they sit in the bar with a cigarette, beer in hand; remember you did it when you were a child, and it's not that difficult to pick up again.

1. Find a route that means not too many cars or pedestrians.
2. Decide how long you want to run for.
3. Put on a pair of shorts or tracksuit, t-shirt, and a pair of comfortable shoes.
4. Start running as slowly as you like.
5. Stop if you have to.
6. Come back.
7. Drink water.

I'm not going to pretend that everyone will find this easy, but I promise it will get easier the more you do it (like anything). In the beginning you will feel like an old steam train being started after fifty years of inactivity, which is pretty much what is happening in your body. Think about this when you use all your muscles together like this, propelling you forward. Think about this when you use your lungs, helping you to breathe more oxygen than ever before.

You cough and splutter, and ache and moan, and groan, just like the steam train, but once it's going, it becomes a finally tuned machine, with every part working in sync, just like the human machine.

Your body is already prepared for running, it has been for thousands of years. It is just waiting for the first steps, the raising of the knees, the putting of one foot in front of the other. It will do the rest. It will start the heart pumping faster to get the oxygenated blood out to those muscles. It will work the lungs to get more oxygen into the system, and prepare the sweat to cool you down. This is an amazing machine just waiting to be allowed to work. It's waiting for your instruction.

I won't bore you with the amount of kilo calories you will burn when you run, you can look that up for yourself, but for one thing, you will feel better. Why?

Many of us have sedentary (*requiring sitting or little activity*) jobs, yet our bodies are ready for action – we need to be using the energy we have stored – yet we sit in cars and offices all day, doing little or no real exercise, and the only time our heart rate goes up, is when we (or someone else) makes a mistake at work, or someone pulls out in front of us when we're driving. In both cases, stress has built up in the body as well as the mind and needs to be released.

It must be noted that a man doing a physical job will feel better than an office worker at the end of the day. Although he may be tired physically, he has worked out any stress he has in his body or mind. So if you can't work it out at work, you need to do exercise afterwards, that's why the city gyms are so packed these

days, full of stressed-out city workers.

Most sports need either two or more people to play, or require specific equipment or location. Running requires none of those. You can run in a park, on the streets, from your front door, from the office, in the mountains in the forests, or by the ocean. You only need a pair of shoes. You don't need to compete with anyone else. And when you are out running, you don't need to worry – in fact, worry is the last thing on your mind for two reasons:

Running releases endorphins which are a natural pain killer.

You have to concentrate on your breathing!

Running is nature's mood lifter; it can lift a low mood or stop anxiety in minutes. This isn't a medical fact, I'm telling you this from experience. I suffered for some time with anxiety and panic attacks and running was the only thing that helped me. It cleared my mind of all the nonsense that was going on, and calmed my shaky body down too. You see, there is no time for feeling bad when you've got to keep putting one foot in front of the other for the next five miles.

Your brain starts to regulate itself, your breathing calms down. You start to notice feeling significantly less stressed. You stop thinking so much.

One thing that happens when I run is that I take more notice of things. I start to notice people, buildings I hadn't seen before, I pay attention to my environment, it becomes more than just a run, it becomes like a mini-adventure! What will I see today? What will make me laugh? What will make me sad?

In fact, a large part of this book is the result of observations made over years whilst running, because with a clear mind, you can see further, and that's one thing running gives you – a clear mind.

The first thing I noticed were the cars, not because I had really thought about pollution in a deep way before, but because the fumes were making choke. I really couldn't breathe when I was running, and believe me, when you're running, the last thing you want to be breathing is anything less than pure O₂!

I also noticed that whilst car drivers were in the traffic queue, beating their fists on the steering wheel, urging the traffic to hurry up, I sailed right by them in their shiny cars, with nothing but footpower!

I felt better that day. I felt like I understood something that was so much more than just caring about the environment. I could feel them looking at me, as if to say: "I'd swap this lump of metal right now for a pair of those shoes," and I realised that for all the money they had invested in their cars, in that moment, they actually envied me. For a runner that's a great feeling, even if it is only in your mind.

There are many things you start to notice as you go for a run, both about yourself and the outside world – some good, some bad. The main thing you notice is the feeling of being free. Free to experience the world at first hand, to get up close to things, to animals, trees, people. To run wherever you choose, to change direction a million times, and no one tell you you're going the wrong way; to breathe the oxygen that gives us life, to use the muscles in our bodies, to appreciate what an amazing species we are, and what we are truly capable of.

Remember, you don't need to take a university degree to find this out, you just put one foot in front of the other and let yourself fall into a run, it's that easy. There's no competition with anyone else, you don't need to enter a race, or time yourself, you just need to get out there and experience life.

At the end of your run as your system starts to slow down, your heart rate returns to normal, you have a warm shower or bath and just relax. Total relaxation. No urges to do anything – your mind more at peace, your body calm. It sure beats having a drink or a cigarette to "relax" any day!

I am not trying to convert you to a new sport, or get you to spend money on running shoes, I just want to share with you something that has given me years of joy. Something that helped me relax, feel good about myself and get out into nature, whilst getting fit at the same time. You may have your own sports and hobbies, but if you have never been for a run then I urge you to try it.

In the beginning you may only run 100 metres, but the more you do it, the better you will feel. What have you got to lose? You start to lift your knees up, put one foot in front of the other, the body starts running... You can stop any time you like, for as long as you like, and you never have to try it again. But if you can, try to experience the joy and freedom of running.

Remember. It's free!

[Back to Index](#)

S

Science

1. *A particular branch of scientific knowledge*
2. *Ability to produce solutions in some problem domain*
3. *Research into questions posed by scientific theories and hypotheses*

Science is fascinating, don't you think? I never liked it much at school, but that was probably because (a) I couldn't understand it and (b) I couldn't see the point of all the experiments we were doing. But recently I have become more interested in it.

Thanks to the endeavours of thousands of scientists around the world, we have learnt so much about the world we live in, and we have even learnt to control some parts of nature through it.

Unfortunately, science doesn't make many friends in the religious arena, especially where it attempts to explain how the world was created. Big bang theory vs. Creationist theory.

Right now, I am sure there are hundreds of arguments going on as to who created the universe, and as you can imagine, both parties seem to be upset at the others' stance. On the one side you have the scientists who use laws and models to do their intricate investigation, attempting to unravel the mysteries of the universe; and on the other, the religions just "believe" or have "faith" in the books written about god creating the universe. But both have one thing in common, they both seek truth.

Truth

1. *A fact that has been verified*
2. *Conformity to reality or actuality*
3. *A true statement*
4. *The quality of being near to the true value*

So what is this mysterious thing that the religions and the scientists are seeking? Truth. Such an innocuous little word but, has so much power behind it. What I want to know is, can we ever find the truth of everything? Will we know so much through scientific enquiry that we can finally say: "Yes sir! We've got it! We know everything." Unfortunately, history has taught us "that it ain't necessarily so!"

I do not have room for all the scientific theories that have been disproved over the years, and remember that science has been in existence in one shape or form for many thousands of years, so why do the scientists keep saying: "Yes, that's definitely the truth, that's definitely the way it works?"

Now don't get me wrong, I think the scientists do a wonderful job, but as a friend recently told me "science can explain how things work, but not why, that's not our domain." So why do scientists keep telling us they have the answers, why do they pretend to be universal authorities on everything, when science is still in infancy (maybe just out of nappies!)

"Oh, but we know so much more now, we have much more sophisticated instruments, we have supercomputers, a more complex modelling software, we'll find out the truth soon enough," say the world's best authorities, and we believe them, because it all sounds so convincing. They have amazing experiments that "prove" things.

We don't have to go back far in our history books to find sir isaac newton (1642-1727), one of the world's most eminent scientists, whose theories were widely accepted until an unknown scientist disproved some of them nearly 200 years later! That scientist was albert einstein (1879-1955), whose theories on relativity are now widely accepted.

Tell me how many years (given we have plenty of "time") will it take for einstein's theories to be disproved?

"But we *know* that man came from the apes, we have evidence, we have traced him back millions of years. We have skeletons, we have fossils, we have evidence!"

And that, my friends, is what the religious crowd are missing at the moment, evidence. Sure they've got their texts (which are the word of god), they have some miracles, and erm, what else? Anyone?

Unfortunately, their theories don't have hard facts behind them, just a lot of belief (*vague idea in which some confidence is placed*). So in this instance I feel slightly sorry for them. The wolves are closing in. The evolutionary biologists, the physicists, the chemists, the mathematicians, they are all working hard to disprove the creationist theory; but I can tell you one thing, given what we know about the nature of truth (not a lot), there is as much chance of there being an all powerful supernatural being who created the world, as there not being.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

So we found a few bones, so we did a bit of geological research, but like the religious lot, I sometimes find it hard to believe we originated from the apes, and weren't created just as we are. It just doesn't make sense to me.

We are told by the scientists that we have been evolving for millions of years, so does that mean we will keep evolving? Will we not stay like this forever? And one more thing. If we evolved from the apes, why haven't they evolved into humans?

To a "serious" scientist these might sound like stupid questions, but I want to know. Perhaps some scientist would be kind enough to fill me in? But although the scientists think they have evidence, perhaps they are just making the science fit the idea? (something that was done to prove that a certain race of people were in fact, not the same species as us, amongst other dubious scientific experiments done in the past.) How do we know the truth of it all, can someone else tell us this truth?

Mathematics

1. *A science (or group of related sciences) dealing with the logic of quantity and shape and arrangement*

The mathematicians think they can. And as a friend recently said to me: "alan, everything in life is mathematics." And she went on to explain how developing a model (*a hypothetical description of a complex entity or process*) using specific language (mathematical notation), they could predict almost anything.

She explained that the Egyptians had developed mathematics for practical use over 2000 years before the birth of Christ, and that the ancient Babylonians had invented a position system based on the number 60, which is still in use today (if you look at your watch or a clock you will know what I am talking about). She also explained the role of the Chinese, the Mayans and the Indians in developing mathematics, and that it is used now in economics, politics, and the natural sciences. It was all a bit hard for me to take in, but I understood one important point and that was that it was all about relationships.

So I sat down to think about it, and suddenly I realised; of course; if we didn't have numbers and a way to compare them, how would you add up your shopping? How would you know which product was the cheapest? How would you know what was later and what was earlier? If I had no numbers (*the property possessed by a sum or total or indefinite quantity of units or individuals, A concept of quantity involving zero and units*) to use, how could I measure anything?

It seemed to me the invention of numbers and a method of comparing them was a crucial turning point in Man's history. But they are something we take for granted today, aren't they?

"Oh, I missed the 10.35 train, I'll catch the 11.35."

It seems so simple to say, but what is a number? Is it something real? Is it something inherent in the universe? Well, actually they are man-made, but all the religions in the world give some numbers greater significance than others; such as the number 3, also known as the trinity (*the union of the father and son and holy ghost in one godhead*) and 666, the number of the beast. We even have mysterious superstitions about the number 13 being unlucky, even though it is just the sum of twelve and one.

But why use numbers to describe these things? After all, numbers are just man-made ways to compare things in a relationship. I couldn't believe that there was anything more intrinsic (*belonging to a thing by its very nature*) in them. Numbers were man-made concepts.

But I started to wonder about whether a natural form of mathematics existed in the brain, something that was inherent, not created by thought. I wondered why we found some faces more attractive or ugly, or why we liked certain body shapes better than others.

The scientists would tell you we like these shapes because of the way we respond to them sexually. So we like a woman with large eyes, small nose, full lips, large breasts, flat stomach, rounded bottom and long legs, because these shapes are what arouse us sexually. But that couldn't be the truth of it, after all, in some countries the men dislike skinny women, and instead opt for more plump figures, so perhaps it is just cultural?

Perhaps it's to do with the relationship between the dimensions of each of the individual body parts, and there is much evidence to support that. One part being half the length of another, or double, or equal to

another. I wasn't sure at all. Was there some secret numbering system going on in everyone's mind that could tell them everything they needed to know without having to think about it?

The problem was, I couldn't be sure what was going on!

We used comparison on a daily basis. "I'm richer than you;" "you're more powerful than I am;" but what could mathematics really tell us about the nature of everything? After all, it seemed to deal more in probabilities and possibilities than truth. My friend explained.

"My grandfather had a car accident the other day. With mathematics we could develop a model to predict, not only how probable it was that he was going to have an accident, but also why it happened. To find out why the accident happened, we would need to measure the speed he was going at (the other car was stationary), then we would need to measure the tyres and the depth of the tread, the surface of the road, the camber of the road, and the weather."

"But how do you account for the fact that he may have looked away for a second, or his friend distracted him, or he thought of something which took his mind off the road, or a song came on the radio he liked, in fact there could be a myriad of possibilities!"

She looked at me and smiled.

"That, alan," is the human error we factor in to all calculations."

"What?" I said. "Then we are no nearer reaching the truth than we were when we started! But tell me how you can measure how probable it was that he was going to have an accident?"

"Well," she said, "He doesn't normally go out in the car, so the probability that he was going to have an accident would be very, very low, but that day, my aunt phoned him, to invite him to his granddaughter's birthday party, so the probability went up. The weather conditions made the road icy, so again the probability went up, and the time he was driving meant that there were more cars on the road. But," she explained, "if the other driver had had an argument with his boss, and had left work angry, and was driving carelessly, then the probability would go up. Also, you had to factor in his tyres, and whether he was distracted. And you could factor in that if my grandfather had been driving a little quicker, then he would never have met the car because the car would not yet have arrived at the roundabout, but then there could have been another car who was in a hurry and the accident could have happened anyway...."

I think I had heard enough. All this science could do was predict possibilities, but it was pure chance, or as some of the more superstitious among you might say, luck (or bad luck in grandfathers case!).

Chance

1. *An unknown and unpredictable phenomenon that causes an event to result one way rather than another*
2. *A possibility due to a favourable combination of circumstances*
3. *A measure of how likely it is that some event will occur; a number expressing the ratio of favourable cases to the whole number of cases possible*

So how are we doing? Are we starting to understand truth or, thanks to "human error," can we never possibly predict everything? You see, human is what we are, and we make the rules that govern science; and we also make the mathematical models.

Is there a chance, even a small chance, we may make a mistake? After all, we always have to factor in human error. I'm sure if there are any scientists reading this, they will be livid by now, saying that's not how they work, and they test everything against all possibilities. But they can never know the truth of it all, because science is developed by thought, and thought is limited, due to the constraints on it by memory, knowledge, conditioning and experience. Do you understand?

So here we are, back to square one, where the creationists have as much chance of being right as the scientists; but I am not going to start another argument about who has the most evidence, this whole topic of conversation has become, shall we say, a little tedious!

I don't think it matters whether or not the world was created by chance, due to favourable conditions existing in the universe, or by a supernatural being, do you? Why would it? We are here. The end.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

But of course, due to Man's inquisitive nature, he just can't help asking the questions why and how! And don't get me wrong, scientific discovery has done a lot of good for the human race, but it has also done a lot of harm in the development of weapons and poisons, to name just two. So, in order to find out truth, we must not discount both theories, but merely pay no attention to them; they are, after all, just theories.

“But we seek truth” say all of you, “where will we find it?”

But let me ask you a question: What is truth, is it really something solid? Is it something that can be told to everyone and they just say: “Oh yes, of course, how silly of me?” Of course not, it's like me telling you the answer is $E=mc^2$.

What would that mean to you?

It would probably mean as much to you as it does to me – nothing. We are told it is an important equation, but can you see what it is just by looking at it? It is the same with all scientific books and religious texts. They present an answer.

“And man was created in gods, image,”

But that's the equivalent of writing the answer to all life's problems is $L = C + E^2 \times \text{sum}(S2 - 3.023)$. Does that mean anything to you?

Well, believe it or not, that is the formula I have created to explain everything. From now on you don't need to understand yourself, you don't need to be compassionate and loving, you don't need to explore everything you are and everything you think, you don't need to deconstruct yourself and break free from society's rules and regulations. This formula is the truth. I have been working on it for many years and I promise you it is the answer. I WOULD NOT LIE TO YOU. This is the truth. Believe it.

$$L = C + E^2 \times \text{sum}(S2 - 3.023)$$

This is the answer to all of your problems

This is absolute truth

Blah, blah, blah

Funnily enough, as I found out, truth is a kind of personal thing, it's not something you can share with others, it may not even be absolute truth, it is just your truth and in fact the answer is irrelevant, it's how you get there that matters (as any science teacher will tell you!)

[Back to Index](#)

Self

1. *Your consciousness of your own identity*
2. *A person considered as a unique individual*

No mind tricks
No double life
No division
I am

For so many years, I have posed the question to myself: “Who am I?” But after writing the two topics today on brain and consciousness, I feel a little bit foolish. You see, I have spent the last few years on a journey into myself; I have attended retreats, and almost joined a zen monastery in the desperate search to find out my true identity, but it was staring me in the face the whole time. I am me. In fact, I am, to be more precise.

“But who are you?” you ask.

“I am,” I reply.

You see, we spend so much money and time going into this by attending retreats and reading “spiritual guidance” books, all because we want someone else to tell us who we are. Now it all seems like easy money for them! Any time we start to pose ourselves the question: “Who am I?” we create division and can never see the truth. We separate ourselves into two people, one asking the question and one providing the answer. But it really is simple, and if you go into a dialogue with yourself, you will find out soon enough.

We are whole, undivided, but because thought cannot understand how it is thinking, it poses the question: “Who is it that it is doing the thinking here, me or someone else?”

Silly old thought, it is so limited by knowledge, experience, and memory that it cannot ever hope to understand itself. It is like asking a computer: “Who are you?” Or it asking itself the question! Sure it can ask the question, but because it is limited by the programs inside, it will never be able to answer the question. Do you understand?

When we perceive (*become conscious of*) something, we are perceiving it through the process of memory, experience etc. so it is limited; but when all conflict between the consciousness and the subconscious is ended, we are conscious of everything around us at all times.

We see the man suffering; we see the tree; we see the pollution; the grasping for power, and the greed. We do not need to take a journey into self to see it. We do not need to sit in the lotus position for hours on end chanting mantras to clear our mind, that is still conflict which is division. Do you see?

When I try to force my mind to be quiet, the forcing is the conflict, which becomes the division, and blocks us from seeing the whole. So how do we “see” it? Well, we won't see it by reading books about it, we won't “see” it by meditating, we won't “see” it by abstaining from sex, and do you know why? Because we are already the whole, and all this trying to perceive it blocks it from our view.

I spent years looking for myself and “wham!” one day, here I am, just as I had left me!

We must start from the position that there is nothing more to look for, and with that comes the acceptance that we are already all that we can be. All this trying, and forcing is causing more division of self.

Although we are saying that self is whole, that doesn't mean you will become conscious of that fact immediately, just because I have written it here. You must explore it for yourself. But do not look for anything else. You (your body and your mind, which is part of your body) are already here. What we must do is wake up to this; and the only way to do that, I am afraid, is through insight (*grasping the inner nature of things intuitively*).

You can sit on a cushion meditating on compassion for your whole life and never get it, because in the formal meditation you are trying to “become” enlightened; but in that very process of becoming, you divide. You are already enlightened: Trust me! Actually, don't trust a word I am saying here, test it out for yourselves!

What does enlightened mean? Enlightened is “*make free from confusion or ambiguity; make clear*”.

Now, if we are saying we are already whole but we divide ourselves through conflict, it must mean we already see clearly, but somewhere down the line (probably through conditioning, conforming, desire, education and greed etc.), our sight has been blocked by these processes of the mind.

Accepting wholeness

If we are to pull down the curtains of conditioning, memory and knowledge, we first have to accept wholeness. We have to let it back in to our lives. Then comes the tricky process of “deleting” the programs that have caused the temporary blindness. This isn't something that comes in a flash, like insight does, as it takes time to run through the code, that are – what I call – bolt-ons, or unnecessary programs. But step by

step, as we deconstruct all we have, all we think we are, all we believe, and all we try to become, we will start to see more clearly. Accepting that you are all that you could ever want is the first step in this process.

“Ok, that's all very nice,” I hear some of you grumble, “but tell us who we are!”

But you don't need me to tell you who you are, you know. You are a builder, a plumber, a nice man, a horrible man, a priest, a managing director, a gangster, a politician. You are the label you give yourself, or someone else gives you. You are “first in your class,” “last in your class,” “a success,” “a failure,” “rich,” “poor.” You are a label. “Funny guy,” “serious guy,” “intelligent,” “stupid.” That is your “self” you talk of.

“Oh, yes, david; he's a very successful businessman, he also has a very witty sense of humour, but he can be a bit arrogant at times, and dare I say it, just plain rude.”

So how many labels did you find? Successful, businessman, witty, humour, arrogant, rude! All in one sentence. And as we label someone, we start to define their “self,” and they start to define it too.

“How do you see yourself david?”

“Well I guess I am positive, definitely a self-starter and a good leader, I am quite demanding of my employees and I don't like people who don't listen, so I guess I can be a bit 'short' at times. But deep down, I am a nice guy and a good father.”

I'll let you pick out the labels in that sentence.

So when we talk about self, are we talking about the whole, the indivisible or are we talking about labels that are assigned to parts of us, like “nice” and “father.” David just is, but he would have difficulty in getting anyone to understand that.

I have a friend from a retreat where I volunteered for a short while and I used to ask him in the morning:

“How are you john?”

To which he would reply:

“I am.”

And that would really infuriate me. I wanted him to say happy, ok, upset, but he didn't want to label himself. I couldn't see it at the time but I do now.

“I just am,” he would keep saying, and it would really throw the retreat visitors.

“Oh, that's nice,” they would say.

But he was right.

He had no need to define himself anymore than he was already defining himself by being in the room.

We wanted him to conform, we wanted him to be “like us” to label himself but he couldn't do it. He knew he was whole, he knew he was the indivisible – and over time, I came to really understand him. And now if he was to answer the question: “How are you john?” with a “fine thanks” or “not too well, got a bit of a cold,” it wouldn't sound true. He just was, like I am, and you are. Why don't you give it a go one day on your path to acceptance of yourself as the whole.

“How are you doing today?”

“I am,” and smile and walk off. That should confuse them!

But seriously, what we are talking about here is not becoming anything nor changing anything but just pure acceptance that you are. NO labels. I am.

You are not a muslim nor a buddhist. That definition instantly divides and causes conflict. No matter what you believe, do not label yourself, that is the path into darkness, not light. NO Labels. You are not a managing director, you are. You are not a criminal, you are. You are not a religious fanatic, you are. You are not a christian, you are.

Can you see? We must remove the label before we begin our journey. Please, this is so important. I want you to ponder this for a few moments. No labels.

When you stop labelling yourselves and everyone else, when you stop trying to become something, and recognise that you are the whole and the whole is you, you can begin your work. Until then, start to pay careful attention to your words. They will either set you free, or keep you imprisoned in division and conflict. Those are the only words I can offer you.

So next time anyone asks you how you are remember what my old pal john would say: “I just am, thanks.” And let that be all.

Sex

1. Activities associated with sexual intercourse

Having sex! It's good isn't it? When we have sexual intercourse, or to use a more polite term, "make love," we feel pretty good about ourselves; and in the main, we are not doing it to reproduce, we are doing it because it gives us pleasure – pleasure for both partners, male and female (I am sure that people of the same sex have just as much pleasure). And the best thing is, it's free; unless you are so desperate that you have to pay someone to have sex with.

Men think about sex a lot, they love to have sex; I know I do. When I have sex, my mind is clear in the moment; no stress, no problems, just unadulterated pleasure! And like most men, if I could have sex all the time, I would.

In the animal world, most animals only have sex to reproduce, whereas we have sex in the most part just for fun. Not because we want to show our partner how much we care about them, but purely to express our primeval self.

The scientists have said that the way that humans have sex is what sets us apart from the animals, giving the reason we are the only species to have sex face to face (apart from an ape relative, I believe), as other animals have sex from behind, but I would suggest to you that having sex is what makes us just like the animals in the world, whether we do it face to face or in any other position.

We like to think of ourselves as being superior to all other species in the world, and in many ways we are. We are aware of ourselves, we walk upright, we have articulate speech, and have superior intelligence. We can make tools, aeroplanes, rockets, guns, buildings that reach far into the sky. We can philosophise about life, we can study literature, write literature, and we can make complex calculations that help us to build bridges that span huge rivers; we can make decisions that affect the whole world.

We are powerful, intellectual beings, capable of great discoveries and inventions. We theorise about the nature of all things, such as the origins of the universe, and the existence of god. We stand in judgement of fallible men who steal, and kill, and go against our civilised societies, and we imprison them, or kill them. We have morality and ethics. We have democracy and government. All in all, we are a pretty advanced civilisation, wouldn't you say?

Yet sex is what brings the most moral of men down, the leaders of great nations; powerful church men, people in positions of authority and responsibility, people in positions of trust. We trust that these men (for it is mainly men) are above the "earthly desires" that us most mortal of men have.

We cannot control ourselves when it comes to having sex, if the opportunity arises, whether we are married with children, engaged to be married, single, or living with someone. It appeals to our natural self – the self whose purpose here on earth is to procreate, and spread its genes far and wide; just like all other creatures here on earth. We are no different in that respect, except we pretend we are.

We pretend we are not like the animals, that we are not a product of evolution, that we didn't start as a simple organism, billions of years ago, and that the natural world exists independently and subordinately to us. We started just as we are now, they say. "Man was created in god's image. Adam and eve were created by a divine power."

But if you think about it carefully, sex is the one thing that shows us we are the end product of a long process, and no doubt will keep evolving for millions of years to come.

Let's go into this together shall we?

If you look at two dogs having sex, or two cows, or two chimpanzees, do you see the similarity between them and us? Can you see the connection between two dogs having sex and you and your partner having sex? Can you see that in the moment, we are exactly the same?

For many centuries humans have tried to distance themselves from the animal kingdom, and rightly so! We are a breed apart, we have nothing in common with them, save the fact we share the planet. Animals are here to be used by humans as food, pets, and whatever else we wish to do with them. We would never admit that we are actually just the same, except for the wonderful twist of fate which allowed us to walk upright, thereby freeing our hands; and the unlikely development of consciousness, which has made us what we are – homo sapiens; human.

In our desperate desire to become civilised (*having a high state of culture and development both social and technological*) we have pushed sex into the darkroom of life, something we know we all want but do not talk about. Sex has become a cause for embarrassment.

We all do it behind closed doors, and although your mum and dad do it, all your friends and family do it, your teachers, and your leaders do it, it is something that must never be discussed. We all know it is necessary for reproduction, we all know it gives us great pleasure, but please never talk about it.

Can you imagine your president or prime minister engaged in the act of sex? They encounter a woman, their eyes meet, the passion is inflamed, they grab at each other kissing passionately, and they quickly tear off their clothes, they kiss each other all over each others bodies, licking and biting playfully, she takes his penis in her mouth and he in turn licks her vagina. By now, his manhood is fully erect and he inserts it into her vagina. He pumps furiously, in out, in out, she moans and groans and lets out excited little screams of pleasure whilst he grunts. Their bodies are entwined with sweat glistening over their naked bodies. Soon she shudders and cries out as she has an orgasm, and shortly afterwards, the president, still pushing in and out, sweating and breathing heavily lets out a long moan and ejaculates into her vagina. They lie for a moment breathing heavily, their chests rising and falling, sweat dripping from their foreheads.

“Wow that was great!” they both say.

Shortly afterwards, the president goes back to the manly task of running the country, sending troops off to war, and talking about morality and the sanctity of marriage, thanking god for his wonderful wife, whilst all the time wondering how he will explain himself if he ever gets caught out!

Tell me, does this fictional little story not remind you of the animals? Can you see your primordial self within here, or does this story disgust and embarrass you?

How many times have we seen our leaders, or people in positions of responsibility, being caught out having sex with someone? There's always some story in the news about a priest, politician, or teacher getting caught up in some “sex scandal,” at which point they come out and with head hung low, apologise for letting everyone down, promise never to do it again, say they love their wife, and they are very, very, very sorry!

Why do they do this? Because they are all preaching to us about morality (*motivation based on ideas of right and wrong*), and telling us how to live our lives, when what they should do is acknowledge that sex is a natural act, as we are, in fact, part of the animal kingdom and the natural world, and that there is nothing dirty, or disgusting with having sex, and that all the ideas of sex being only in the sanctity of marriage is pure dogma, and in fact, they do not practice it themselves. What an admission that would be!

What I am trying to discuss with you here is not the sex life of one fallible politician, it is to understand that we are a part of nature, that we are not above nature; and that sex is not something that shouldn't be talked about, or hidden away. It is the most natural thing in the world. Two people who have primeval desires, who wish to express them with each other – whether married or not.

This is not about morals (which are only man-made rules), it is about acknowledging that sex is not something to be embarrassed about, or shut away, but solely a method for procreation in the natural world, and for us humans, probably the one pleasure that is out of the control of judges, politicians, religious leaders, teachers or parents.

It is something to be enjoyed with another, and we have to ask ourselves why anyone would want to control it, or teach people that it is something only to be enjoyed by a “married” couple. After all, marriage is just another way of controlling society.

I am sure some of you will be horrified by the way I have openly discussed sex (the insertion of the male penis into the female vagina), and you may wish to complain to someone that this kind of literature should not be made available on the shelf; that it should be kept out of the reach of children, and in fact probably shouldn't have been written at all! That maybe I (as the writer) should be locked up for peddling this filth. But then you must examine your own attitudes to sex, and try to discover why you think it is “dirty,” or something not to be openly discussed; after all, billions of people are doing it every minute of the day.

Parents, teachers, and all those in positions of responsibility try to condition us to thinking a certain way, but if – as the previous example shows us – they cannot control their sexual urges, why should we?

It is not something that should be controlled or condemned, but expressed naturally. It is not even something that has to be between two people who love each other – again that is only a man-made idea. Do you think chimpanzees who have sex “love” each other? “Love” is only emotional expression, nothing more spiritual than that.

The time has come when humans must admit, that although we have developed a more civilised society,

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

which dictates that people can't have sex in the streets with whoever they want, sex is a lot more civilised than killing people in war. Our attitude to sex is only conditioning, and when we break through that conditioning, we will realise, that although we are the most intelligent species on the planet, and must respect each others wishes with regards to sex, it is not what makes us human, it is what makes us animal.

Although it is probably quite frightening for most to think of ourselves as nothing more than animals, when it comes to the act of sex, there is nothing human in it all. Human qualities are of the mind – the awareness of self, the ability to show compassion for others, and the ability to use our imagination – sex is of the primal brain, the brain that runs on automatic pilot, that provides us with all our survival instincts; sex is one part of that.

In the act between two people who want to have sex with each other, awakening the animal within provides a welcome relief from being human, which is all about self-control and discipline, although the great thing about being human is that we have the ability to experience, enjoy, and understand this ancient animal urge.

Many people say that having sex is the one time they can lose control in life (just ask any politician or judge), so go on, enjoy having sex, in the understanding that is not something dirty or embarrassing, or immoral, but something so natural, the whole world have been doing it for millions of years. And next time you see two dogs having sex, remember, that underneath your fancy clothes, your important job and intellectual ideas, you are exactly the same as them.

[Back to Index](#)

Silence

1. *The state of being silent (as when no one is speaking)*
2. *The absence of sound*

The world is a noisy place, isn't it? Our lives are filled with noise at work, home, and at play, that's why we need to go off somewhere peaceful for a holiday whenever we can. Have you noticed what kind of noise it is though? It's not a natural sound, it's mechanical and artificial. Cars revving their engines, and sounding their horns, noisy trucks hurtling by, planes coming into land and taking off again, music in the car, music in the shops, music in the pub, even in your head.

We're surrounded by talking, laughing and shouting, but the one problem with the design of the human being – the one thing we don't have control of – is the ability to shut off sound coming into our ears and our brain. We have an “always on” connection to the world. It's not like being able to close your eyes, to disappear off into a dream world for ten seconds, you're always listening, always ready to take in new input.

Have you ever been in nature and noticed the noise? Sometimes it can be deafening! But it's a different kind of sound; a natural sound that comes from the animals, the birds, and the wind shaking the trees. It's a place you can sit and listen, without feeling stressed, as if all the frequencies of the notes you hear, are perfectly in tune with your body and mind.

Have you ever been at the ocean on a wild winter's day, and watched the waves come crashing in against the rocks, the wind whipping up against your face? The sounds are incredible, but they do not make us stressed; instead when we leave, we feel invigorated by our experience.

Now transport that scenario to the city you live in. Imagine recreating that volume with city noise. It would be unbearable, don't you think?

Have you ever watched a sailing ship glide by? It moves quickly, yet seemingly effortlessly and silently through the waves, the wind billowing in its sails. Now compare that to a speed boat or a jet ski passing, and imagine the noise of the motor and the sound of the hull crashing against the sea.

It's interesting to notice that although nature is powerful, the noise does not disturb us in the same way as man-made power does. It's as if we are able to process natural sounds calmly, but mechanical sound grates on our nerve endings.

So, although we may hate noisy cities, and are always complaining about cars and planes, we deliberately fill our heads with noise every day. We get up in the morning, listen to the news, turn on the radio in the car or listen to a music player on public transport. We have noise in the office or in the factory or anywhere we work. We talk on the phone all day, we talk to other people all day, we finish work and get back on public transport or into the car, and turn on music or news. We get home, we talk to our partners or friends on the phone, we turn on the tv for the latest news or soap; we may go out for a meal, or to a pub where there is loud talking or music, we come home and go to bed... Our brain utterly exhausted from the days input.

Now compare that day to the sound of the sailing ship gliding by, or listen to the sounds of a waterfall, or the ocean, or the birds in the trees. It is easy to see how we can become so stressed in such an environment, don't you think?

Most of us live in such highly urbanised environments, full of unnatural sounds that are not in tune with the natural world. That is why meditation and relaxation cd's have the sound of wind, waves, whales, and streams flowing on them, it's what puts us back into our natural state of relaxation.

It may have taken us millions of years to evolve as humans, but we have only been exposed to these unnatural sounds for 150 years, tv's for 50 years, and personal music players for the last 25 years. We have not had time to adjust to these new sounds.

In ancient times, people had no tv or music players to keep them company, but they did hear the sound of the wind, rain, birds and animals, even at home, whereas now modern houses are so insulated from the outside world that there are no natural sounds allowed to get in. Double glazed windows have made sure you can't hear the wind and the rain, and wall insulation has meant you feel no draught. You are cocooned in a house, alienated from your natural state, now able to hear your own thoughts. For most people that's a scary proposition.

Have you ever wondered why you get up and put the tv or radio on straight away, or fill your head with music whilst walking to work, or even whilst out for a walk in nature? We normally just put this down to living a modern lifestyle, but it's much more than that. Let's look into this more deeply shall we?

Have you ever *not* turned on the tv, or put music, or the radio on? How often have you sat in your home and done nothing,, with no external stimulation to keep you company? Once, twice, never? Have you ever

had any reason to?

We constantly fill our ears with input, keeping our brains busy during the day. We never allow ourselves to be with our own thoughts. We are never quiet enough to hear what's going on in our own brains. We never give our mind a moment to rest. We have become so accustomed to hearing artificial noise that now we can't live without it. But sitting with our own thoughts does require great patience, although requires no effort. All you have to do, is to sit in one place, momentarily.

Close your eyes and let the thoughts of your brain wash over you. Don't try to interact with them, just watch them as if they were being carried along by a wave. It's hard at first; your first reaction being to open your eyes and fidget, or go and do something else – but just sit. You don't have to study meditation or listen to whale music to do this. Just sit. Try it with me now if you wish. You will need to read through it first, as you will want to close your eyes...

1. *Turn off your tv and music player, and make sure no one will disturb you for about two or three minutes.*
2. *Sit upright in a comfortable position and focus for a moment on a point on the wall.*
3. *Take three deep breaths (one thousand, two thousand) remembering to breathe out slowly (one thousand, two thousand, three thousand, four thousand), and gently unclench your hands and drop your shoulders. Close your eyes...*
4. *Now, visualise a perfect wave in your mind, and gently let it envelop your entire body, let it relax every muscle and nerve ending in your body, from the tip of your toes to the top of your head.*
5. *Now pay attention to your thoughts; don't fight with them, don't tell yourself not to think.*
6. *Just try to let any thoughts you have come and go on the wave. Breathe normally and do this for about a minute or so...*
7. *When you feel ready, take another deep breath (counting one thousand, two thousand), and breathe out slowly (counting one thousand, two thousand, three thousand, four thousand), and start to notice yourself being more aware of your environment, and gently open your eyes.*

Congratulations, you have experienced your natural state for that short time. Don't worry if you don't get it straight away, just keep practising this simple exercise until you feel comfortable with your own thoughts. The more you do this, the more relaxed you can become, and the more you will find you don't need the tv on all the time, or the music player blasting in your ears.

We are beings of the natural world, not the artificial world. Silence is not boring! It allows us time to gather our thoughts together, and to relax momentarily in a busy world. Just imagine it as bringing the ocean and wind and the rain and the birds to your mind when you don't have time to go on a trip into nature. You can do this anywhere, in the office, on a break, on the bus or the train (just don't try it when you're in the car or operating machinery). You don't need a special mat to sit on, just three minutes to close your eyes.

When we are talking about silence, we are not talking about being in a vacuum, because remember nature isn't silent, it's just that we are in tune with those sounds. If you have ever been on a camping trip and fallen asleep to the sound of rain on your tent you'll know what I mean. Try it. You never know, you may enjoy your three minute holiday from the stress and noise that artificial life has created for us. You are part of the natural world after all.

[Back to Index](#)

Smell

1. *The sensation that results when olfactory receptors in the nose are stimulated by particular chemicals in gaseous form*
2. *The general atmosphere of a place or situation and the effect that it has on people*
3. *The faculty that enables us to distinguish scents*
4. *The act of perceiving the odour of something*
5. *Emit an odour*

Roll on
Spray on
Splash on
The great cover up!

Many years ago, I used to share my house with a labrador. I don't know if you've ever had one, but his sense of smell was acute! He could smell the fridge door opening at over four hundred metres. Whatever was cooking, wherever he was, he would hunt down the smell and sit, tail wagging, mouth salivating until he was “rewarded” with some of my food. Our sense of smell isn't as well developed as his, but it is still one of the most powerful senses we possess.

Smells get right into the brain instantaneously, and produce a reaction, which may be pleasant, sensuous, calming, stimulating, or just downright disgusting.

Some smells affect only individuals, whilst others are liked or detested by people equally. For example, an addicted smoker finds the smell of the cigarette being lit wonderful – he just can't wait until he takes his first puff. This is also the case for many ex-smokers who have given up for years, but suddenly catch the smell of cigarette smoke, and are motivated to start thinking about buying cigarettes again!

It sounds crazy doesn't it? But having been a smoker, I can relate to it. The chemicals in the smoke we inhale, react with chemicals in our brain, and provide us with a sensation of pleasure. For someone who's never smoked, someone lighting up next to him might be the most disgusting smell ever. His brain has never made a pleasure connection with the smell and as such, rejects it as it rightly should (only an addicted smoker thinks that the smell of cigarettes is nice).

All around us, we are surrounded by different smells, all competing for space in our olfactory system. The whole world smells of something, but whether we find it pleasant, is a different matter. During my life I have travelled to many different countries, and the first thing I notice when I leave the airport is how each place smells different. Each is unique.

Across Europe, the smells vary less, but when you reach Asia it really hits you. Whether it is the smell of fuel from the taxis, unfamiliar foods cooking, or a combination of many things, I am not sure, but I feel excited, just by smelling a new place!

Of course, for the locals it's just another day; they don't notice it because they are used to it, but they would notice a difference if they came to the UK.

Before we get caught up in discussing all the billions of different smells in the world, and their effect on us, let us look, or indeed, smell a little closer to home! That's right, ourselves.

Are you aware how you smell? Are you aware of the odours you give off? Do you think you give off any odours? How do these odours influence others around you? If I was to ask you on a rating of 1 to 10, how you rate your smell, would you give it a 1 (nice), or a 10 (unpleasant), or somewhere in between?

Most of us in the western world, myself included, would find that hard to answer, because of several factors.

The first, is our breath. We brush the minty gel all over our teeth, and our gums, and our tongue, and scrape away any impurities. We gargle with minty mouthwash, and for the in-between times, we chew minty gum.

The second, is our hair. We wash our hair with perfumed shampoos and conditioners so it doesn't smell bad.

The third, is our body we wash daily with shower gel, that makes us smell like a tropical fruit punch. “Ooh, Alan, you smell so positively fruity.”

The fourth, is underarm deodorant and anti-antiperspirant, just in case we sweat a little, which is natural – I hasten to add – and leave a little sweat (*salty fluid secreted by sweat glands*) on our shirts. We spray or roll on “arctic mist,” guaranteed to keep you dry, and smell free your whole life.

The fifth, is aftershave or perfume. This is the “*piece de resistance*” (sorry, borrowed from the French), the crowning glory of humanity. The smell that attracts a thousand suitors (or not, if you choose the wrong one for your body type). This is the smell that people identify us with. This is the smell you connect to a face.

How many of you have smelled a woman's perfume or a man's aftershave in passing and instantly looked round sure to see an ex-partner? This is the power of smell. The power of association we have in our mind. We have all become so addicted to smelling like this that we have forgotten what we really smell like.

That isn't to say we should never wash. The smell of stale unwashed bodies is one that most of us turn our noses up at. I used to joke with a friend of mine that just because he cared about the environment didn't mean he had to smell!

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

This is nothing to do with washing. If you didn't know it already, washing our bodies to get rid of the daily dirt is a necessary affair. It makes you feel refreshed and clears the mind.

*We all smell of a brand.
We don't even have to wear their fashion labels.
We emit their corporate logo, every minute of the day.*

The real problem is, that in our desperation to become more than animal, we seek to mask our true identities artificially. Not only do we wash with products containing perfumes, and put perfume on our skin, we also wash all of our clothes in perfumed detergent. We have *no idea* what we smell like as a species! How funny is that?

As we know from other topics, the body is a pretty advanced system, and the idea that it would smell bad to other potential mates by design, is ludicrous. The bad smells emitted from our bodies have more to do with covering ourselves up with clothes all day, so the body cannot breathe (thereby trapping bacteria in the sweat glands), and the toxins we ingest on a daily basis. Come on, you didn't think you were going to get away with that one did you? The old saying "you are what you eat" applies here. Sweating is one way for the body to emit toxins.

Have you ever smelt someone (or yourself) after a night out drinking, smoking or taking drugs? The smell is disgusting. It is pure poison. We happily ingest these poisons and wonder why we smell bad! The same applies to the foods we eat.

That is why it is of the utmost importance to pay attention to what we ingest, as it reflects outwardly. But I know all of you like drinking, and partying, and eating unhealthy foods, and as long as you do exercise, everything will be all right. Right?

Cosmetic cover-ups are fine as well, as long as you realise that that is what they are. "Eau de nice smell" is not your natural species odour. You and I don't know what it is to be human. We are not even aware of the subtle smells that attract us to each other, and we do our best to interfere with these processes by wearing deodorants and strong perfumes. The strange thing is, we are now conditioning our minds to be attracted to women wearing specific corporate branded perfumes because we like that smell.

Does this mean we will be attracted to anyone wearing that perfume? Of course not, but it is something to consider.

So what do we do? We like the way these products smell, and as a social animal we don't want to smell bad around other people; so it seems we have no option but to continue using these products more and more.

In some monastical (*of communal life sequestered from the world under religious vows*) retreats, they undergo long periods (six months or more) without washing, shaving or brushing their teeth; in order to purify themselves. To most of us that seems disgusting. Why? Because it reminds us of animals; and deep down it reminds us that if we didn't interfere with nature, that is what we would look like too.

People often despise "dirty smelly unwashed hippies," and I can't say I have ever found that an appealing lifestyle, but in reconnecting with nature, that is precisely what we need to do. If the body is free of toxins there is nothing to contain smell but our clothes. Those are the things that trap bacteria.

Our body has clever natural processes to allow us to sweat naturally; the process of perspiration helps the body maintain homeostasis (*(physiology) metabolic equilibrium actively maintained by several complex biological mechanisms that operate via the autonomic nervous system to offset disrupting changes*). So who is going to be first? Ok, I will!

It is often said that if you allow your hair to become really oily, and don't wash it for a long period of time, then the body starts its own self cleaning process (remember that we are the most advanced species on the planet). The only problem is that we don't allow it time to work.

Because we are now "civilised," the very idea of going to the office with unwashed hair is unthinkable. So we interfere with nature. Clean hair is now associated with the smell of "almond milk shampoo." The association has been made between the olfactory system and the brain, and is now ingrained in the culture. This is what "clean" hair "should" smell like – according to the producers of shampoos; even if it does strip away the hair's natural nutrients!

As consumers, we have no idea if any of these products are doing what they say they are on the label. Is shower gel actually cleaning away the dirt any more than scrubbing with water would, or is it just a foamy

confidence trick?

As none of us (well some of you may be) are scientists, we will never know, but for thousands of years we have got by without foamy shower gels and shampoos. It is time we looked into this carefully and not just accepted what we are told. Someone, anyone, please find out on our behalf and let us know! What do we need to get our skin and hair clean? There! A challenge to you! Is water and a loofah (*the dried fibrous part of the fruit of a plant of the genus luffa; used as a washing sponge or strainer*) sufficient, or do we need something stronger?

I do not have the skills to test this, but if we need one, I am sure there is a natural product out there that complements our body processes at the same time as cleaning our bodies.

Our clothes are a different matter, as they contain bacteria we have picked up during our daily activities. Clothes do need to be washed quite often, as they are against our bodies, but that doesn't mean we all have to smell of "mountain dew" fabric softener. These products are artificial. What we are looking for is something that gets them clean, and does not put chemicals out into the environment through the water system.

The key to smell is whether it is natural or unnatural. Natural smells are important to us, and we know this through using essential oils in "aromatherapy," which have become popular over the last few years (although probably used for thousands of years). Think lavender to calm and soothe, and ylang ylang for sensuality. These smells have a real marked effect on the brain and the emotional system. Smells to calm, smells to uplift, to excite, and to comfort.

The smell of fresh flowers and herbs in your garden or in your house helps to restore harmony. It brings nature's reality indoors where it has long been shut out through brick and glass. Bring some flowers from your garden into your bedroom. Choose different smells for different moods and different rooms. Burn essential oils. Make a sterile concrete home, a natural living place again. Smell the difference!

Talking of smelling the difference, have you ever walked into a room where fried food is being cooked and noticed the smell coming from the food? And tell me, have you ever walked into a room where vegetables are being steamed, and noticed the difference? I don't think I have to say any more do I? Greasy fatty food is a nice smell for some when they are hungry or hungover, but after they have finished, the true pungency of the scorched oil takes on a different smell, don't you think? It also permeates every fibre of your clothing, leaving it smelling rancid. I will leave it up to you to decide if fried food is good for you or not. After all, you do belong to the most intelligent species on the planet.

Have you noticed how smell has also become a status symbol? How wealthy, successful people smell successful, whereas less well off people smell less well off! Is this true?

Well, without making sweeping generalisations, you can see how it could be possible. The more money you have, the more you spend on perfumes, and expensive perfumes use more carefully blended, rarer ingredients which cost much more to produce than the cheaper chemically manufactured mass produced ones. So smelling expensive really could be a possibility!

It is nice to smell nice, that is sure. It gives us a positive feeling. We feel confident, or sexy, but we must remember that it is a confidence produced artificially (even if it is from natural products). We must not rely on external products. We are a human animal with our own smells and they need not be bad. If we don't like bad smells, we should do something about them and so we must let our bodies detox from poisons we have ingested through eating drinking, injecting or smoking, and allow them to purify themselves. They are pretty clever things these bodies.

During this time (a week or a month or however long you wish to do this) do not cover your body smell with artificial perfume. Sure, you may smell a little toxic, and a bit rancid for a short while, but after only a week or so of drinking lots of water, and eating healthy vegetables, you will notice your sweat no longer smells like it used to.

In order to purify yourself, you will have to go through this process with no deodorant! It may help to tell others what you are doing in case they think you are just lazy or don't care that others have to be around you. Most will be impressed. Hey, they may even try it themselves.

After purification, there is no reason not to put a little natural perfume on your pressure points. I don't want you to suffer too much (if being without artificial smells is suffering!). It can even enhance your natural smell (good smell not bad).

The problem with covering ourselves in artificial smells is that we have spent so many years trying to

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

deny we have anything in common with nature. Don't deny it. Remember the monks purifying themselves and what they look like. Like hairy neanderthal beasts! That is what we would all look like without shaving, nail clippers, and cosmetics. Remember it, and go into life unbranded. A fully fledged member of the natural human race.

[Back to Index](#)

Smoking

1. *The act of smoking tobacco or other substances*

Warning: Smoking is Harmful, it contains over 4000 different chemicals, it can harm your child, it causes lung cancer...

“Blah, blah, blah,” says your addicted brain, “heard it all before. Let’s have a smoke.”

My friend gave up smoking today. I have given up a million times before, sometimes for over a year at a time, but gone back to it. But today she and her mother decided to stop together, so I felt it only polite to show willing, and give up alongside them. They are both heavy smokers (twenty five to forty per day), and my friend has never tried to give up before in thirteen years of smoking.

I never have a problem giving up, I don't feel nervous or anxious, I just stop. Then I'm angry with myself for starting again eight months later. I don't know why I start again, it's not even when I'm stressed, something just triggers a desire and a craving to buy cigarettes. Within thirty minutes I'm at the shop, puffing away on my cigarette thinking, "What am I doing...?"

Warning: Putting your head in this machine will cause a slow and painful death

Smoking is one of the great mysteries of our time. If we know that it is not good for the system and we are the most intelligent being on the planet, why do we continue to do it? We see photos of smokers who have cancer and think it's disgusting. Our breath stinks, our houses stink, our clothes stink, it stings our eyes, it makes us cough, it stops us doing sport – sorry, what was it good for again? Well, in the days before the government health warnings, smoking manufacturers told everybody it was good for them. Cured asthma, helped your breathing etc... But I think we can probably discount that advice now, don't you?

So I started a list of what benefits smoking gives me. Here it is:

1. Makes me feel less stressed when I'm anxious about something.
2. Gives me something to do when I'm bored.
3. Makes me feel good in the company of other smokers.

I seriously couldn't think of anything else to write here. I won't bother about making a list against smoking as I think I have enough information on that now. Cigarette advertising is banned now, and I'm sure there are government figures on how many people have not started smoking as a result of it, but to be honest with you, I haven't noticed a marked decrease in the number of cigarette ends I see littering the streets. So I'm not really sure if banning cigarette advertising has harmed the manufacturers. And anyway, what would their message be? "Smoke Brand X, it gives you something to do when you're bored." Not very exciting advertising, is it?

Which leads me to the real reason it doesn't really affect their tobacco sales. Oh, yes, it's *really* addictive.

They know that once you're hooked whether as a teenager at school or later on in life, that you'll be addicted within the first few packets and unless anything goes wrong, (like you die or somehow manage to give up), they know they've got a customer for life. Not a bad business, is it?

Warning: Drinking lethal poison increases your chances of an early death.

So it got me to thinking about this drug, the one that these global multinationals are selling legally in their nice shiny packages. The drug that kills millions of people worldwide. That costs business and healthcare organisations billions of pounds a year.

What is it about this drug that makes me feel nervous if I'm going to a non-smoking restaurant, or if I'm flying for over two hours or staying in a non-smoking house? What is it about a cigarette that makes me do anything to crave it in spite of all the knowledge of the health costs? Let me tell you a quick story.

A friend of mine told me recently he had been on a detox: a liver detox to be precise, and had not drunk any alcohol, eaten any wheat, dairy or meat, and was feeling much better as a result.

"Did you stop smoking?" I asked him.

"No, I don't think I could cope with giving up everything at the same time!" He replied.

When I explained that actually the one thing he should be giving up is smoking, as it is the worst for his health, he still seemed unconcerned. This struck a chord with me as I have done the exact same thing: gone

on a retreat, meditated, went on a fast, detoxed, and do you know the first thing I did when I finished? Had a cigarette!

Warning: Jumping of this building could harm your unborn child

This may seem crazy to those of you who are fortunate enough to have never smoked, but it's even more crazy to someone addicted like me, where I just can't stop smoking. I just can't stop. In a battle of wills, the addiction wins by offering all sorts of promises or threats to make sure I get the nicotine into the system. It doesn't care if it's good for you or not.

I acknowledge that I am the most intelligent being on the planet
I will do what is best for my system
If I do not do what is best for my system
I acknowledge that I am not the most intelligent being on the planet

If you remember, this was a statement we used in the addiction topic. I am not going to cover the addiction side again, but what I want to discuss is that as the most intelligent beings on the planet, most of us try to do what is best for our systems by eating a diet that contains fresh vegetables, fruit, and limit the amount of alcohol we drink; but we can't seem to acknowledge that smoking cigarettes is not good for the system. This is also why we pay no attention to government health warnings.

If I read on a tomato that it could cause lung cancer, or other serious diseases do you think I'd touch it? Not a chance! If I read on a lettuce that it could increase my chances of an early death do you think I'd eat it? Not a chance! I think it is clear that if we could, we would do what is best for our system. So there has to be something blocking our ability to choose to do what is in the best interests of your system. There is: Addiction.

Warning: Eating these grapes could harm you and others around you

Addiction is just a mistake, it has to be, a mistake during the long process of evolution that has left the brain believing that it actually needs cigarettes for survival. If the human body is the most perfect machine on the planet, why do you think it would have allowed itself to become addicted to substances that are not beneficial to the system? I do not have the answer. I am quite lucky in that I can go for months at a time without a cigarette, but I have always gone back to it. Having alcohol always seems to make me want a cigarette too. In fact I never crave a cigarette until I have alcohol but then I could smoke twenty in one night!

It seems crazy and illogical, doesn't it? Especially to someone who has never smoked. They see it as being weak-willed, but it isn't.

I have given up many things in life, including meat, and never had a problem with cravings, but smoking is different isn't it? It prays on your thoughts like a parasite, hijacking rational thinking with a quick "let's have a cigarette" interjection. You feel a little pang of excitement about getting the reward (the cigarette) and are motivated to action to get a packet. It doesn't even matter that it is expensive, and I can't afford it, I just find the money from somewhere! All for something that is killing me.

This addiction is exploited to the max by the cigarette manufacturers. They make billions of dollars keeping us addicted.

Recently I started to wonder how the chief executive sleeps at night, knowing he is selling a product (albeit legally of course) that is killing millions of people round the world and costing health services billions in looking after patients who have developed smoking related diseases. He would argue that people are exercising free will, making a personal choice in buying cigarettes, and he doesn't promote them to the under 18's. So technically, all he's doing is providing a service, much like the drug pushers.

He would have you believe that he is making a different product to cocaine, heroin, ecstasy and alcohol, but although the products may have different effects, they all are to provide pleasure to the brain and are highly addictive. This being the case, free will and personal choice don't come into it. If you are addicted to

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

something, your brain will motivate you to get it whatever the costs to yourself (financial, physical, or emotional).

Tobacco is an industry that employs thousands of people around the world, and contributes billions of dollars to the government in tax raised from the sale of every packet. So you can see that it isn't technically in the government's interest to ban this product. They must have weighed up the health care costs versus the tax raised and fallen on the side of allowing these companies to operate. Despite many government “war on drugs” programs they consistently fail to recognise tobacco as the biggest killer. This is more than likely for economic reasons.

So let's go back to these tobacco companies, these companies who sell death on every street corner.

A moment ago I was wondering how the chief executive sleeps at night, knowing that millions of people suffer as a result of a product he makes, and it came to me. He sleeps the same as the man who is the chief executive of a company that makes nuclear weapons or guns – soundly!

He is happy his company makes plenty of profit, has happy shareholders, a complicit government, and a large salary to boot, what more could he ask for? He doesn't care about the end product, he is concerned purely with the unemotional task of running a business, giving jobs to the community, delivering a product on time, and getting his invoices paid. He is not in the community care business, this is a commercial venture, which exists merely to make money. Why should he be bothered with such paltry things as the health of the nation, that's for the government to deal with. As long as the product he sells is legally approved by the government, he doesn't have to care about addiction, that's for someone else to worry about – someone like you and me.

As I have spent literally thousands of pounds and bought over 3,500 packets of cigarettes over my lifetime (estimated), I was thinking about writing to the chief executive of the cigarette firm, whose brand I am addicted to. The letter would go something like this.

Dear mr chief executive

My name is alan orr. I have been smoking your cigarettes for the past 17 years, although I have hated myself every time I bought them. I have been to hypnotherapy, tried patches, gone cold turkey, and really desperately wanted to stop smoking for good.

As you have managed to addict me, I wondered how you plan to help me stop smoking your cigarettes. I don't want them, but I crave them, and the cravings are sometimes too much too bear. What is it you put in these legal products that I can't stop having them?

I await your reply eagerly, as I would like to stop smoking, and having tried everyone else, I thought that maybe you have the antidote, but don't want to use it as you would lose money.

If you help me, I promise to keep it a secret between us.

*Yours sincerely
alan orr*

What do you think the answer would be?

Do you think the cigarette company wants you to stop? Of course they don't. As we discussed previously, they are a commercial business, and are not in the business of spreading good health to all corners of the globe, but maybe they could! Forget what people say they want, that's merely addiction talking. If the cigarette manufacturers wanted to do something good for the world they could.

So how about stopping making cigarettes, there's a radical idea!

I'm not talking about banning cigarettes either. If you ban something, people are so stupid that they want it even more, even if it's not good for the system. I'm talking about cigarette companies wanting to do the right thing for humanity.

Of course if you work for a cigarette company you may lose your job, but you'll get another one. Isn't the health of the planet important to you? Probably not. Of course, clandestine cigarette making operations would set up to provide the “customers” with what they wanted, selling at black market rates, but if you went to that trouble to get your hands on cigarettes wouldn't you see that you were truly addicted, that you would do anything to get your hands on a small stick that you inhale acrid smoke into your lungs with?

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

So smokers of the world (that's you and me), let us try to do something that so many have failed in, and that is giving up cigarettes, and showing all the chief executives of the cigarette companies that we won't support their expensive lifestyles or their luxury villas anymore, and that we do care, not only about our own health, but we also take personal responsibility for the litter that smoking causes and the billions of dollars of other people (tax payers) money that gets wasted trying to save human beings that are addicted to smoking.

We also take responsibility for the disgusting smell that permeates so many of our cafes, bars, and restaurants, and we acknowledge that although it was not our fault we became addicted, we will not let smoking control our lives anymore. We want to breathe real air, not air filtered with tobacco and a thousand other chemicals, and we want to be able to exercise without having to stop for a breather every minute or so. We will stop supporting the employees of cigarette companies who are having rather a nice lifestyle at our expense.

I make this commitment with you today to stop smoking forever and I hope you make it too. We may feel anxious at the thought of giving up, but I for one do not want to be suffering with lung cancer in five years while cigarette company shareholders are enjoying their dividends.

Do it today. Make this your personal revolution. Don't be kept in the prison of addiction that makes us weak and powerless. Exercise your power to do something for the benefit of your own system, and then... Exercise! Cough up that phlegm that's been stuck in your chest all these years. Clear it out, then breath deeply. Remember, deep breathing is what gives you most of the pleasure you get when you inhale a cigarette! Think about it.

If you get tense, just inhale some nice fresh air and you'll feel 100% better. Fresh air isn't going to kill you. Smoking probably will.

[Back to Index](#)

Spiritual

1. *Concerned with sacred matters or religion or the church*
2. *Concerned with or affecting the spirit or soul*
3. *Lacking material body or form or substance*

These days, spirituality is often used in preference to “religious,” as in “I’m spiritual but not religious;” but what exactly is it to be spiritual? Is it real, or is just another man-made concept – a projection of the mind? Is it perhaps just a feeling that there is something else, that maybe this life is not quite so black and white, that maybe after all, there is another life waiting for us, or that although our bodies die, “we” do not? That’s what we are here to investigate.

We all like to believe in something, and hold on to the remote possibility that there is more to life than just living and dying! We hope we will find our true purpose in life when we “cross over” to the other side; but what is this “other side”?

Some of us believe we have a soul, and the soul can never die: it being our life force, the thing that keeps us alive. But do you really believe we can exist forever, or could it merely be a hope we are not going to just slowly decompose in a hole in the ground, never to be heard of again.

Soul

1. The immaterial part of a person; the actuating cause of an individual life

2. A human being

“Spiritual” has become the new buzz word for the so-called “new age” community the world over. I found this out quickly when I went to live at a buddhist community in scotland for a short while.

“You know, alan, I’m a very spiritual person, I’ve always known that. I’m very in tune with the aura and the spiritual world in general.”

Unfortunately, when people use the word spiritual all the time I tend to tune out with what they are saying. I get the feeling that most people just want you to know they are something more than they seem, that they are somehow involved in a secret, hidden, other world that only the few have access to. All this talk of spiritualism really starts to make me wonder about the human race.

Now whilst I am fairly sure (although one can never be sure of anything) that matter and energy never dies – it transforms, like a rain drop falling as snow, then melting into water only to be evaporated by the suns rays – this is a process of the universe, of life, not of some special spiritual place.

The idea that Man retains his consciousness and his memory when he dies is, I’m afraid, just the good old mind projecting what it wants to believe. But that is not truth.

Whilst at the buddhist retreat, I met a lady who was obsessed with “angels,” and she told me that because I didn’t believe, I would never see the angels who were there to protect her. I asked her what would she believe in if no one had ever mentioned the word “angels” to her, which confused her somewhat.

“If you had never heard of angels would you still believe in them?”

“Errm, of course! What a stupid question,” she replied.

This is not about belief or disbelief. We are not here to argue whether there is a spiritual world or not, that would lead us nowhere. What I want to understand with you here is why we have become trapped into thinking about this spiritual world, and why we have to (a) try to convert people to believing, and (b) keep talking about it all the time. Ok, you believe that there is a spiritual life. Great. Enjoy your belief. You’re not harming anyone else as long as it stays in your head. It’s also great if you don’t believe that there is a spiritual life, fantastic! Just keep that to yourself as well.

But why do we have to keep talking about this?

For thousands of years, people have been trying to convert others to become believers in the “soul,” but as I said in the afterlife topic, if someone tries to sell us car insurance, we stop, question it, and question it again. With this spirituality stuff, one person mentions that there is a soul, and onto the bandwagon we all go. Do you understand what I am trying to say here?

For millennia, Man has been projecting this idea of a soul onto other people, telling stories of contact with the other side, of ghosts and poltergeists, demons and angels, but what is the truth of it? We have to investigate this ourselves thoroughly with an open mind, not conditioned by what others believe.

Ghosts and other worldly apparitions!

For as long as history has been documented, there have been stories of ghosts appearing, like poltergeists making pots and pans bang in the kitchen, throwing stuff about, and generally making a nuisance of themselves. There have been stories of people possessed by demons, and most people will be able to relate a story of ghostly contact that happened to someone in the family. My mother has one.

“On the night my mother died, I stayed in her flat. After a traumatic day I went to bed. As I was lying asleep in her bed I could hear breathing and then I felt a hand in my back. There was no one else there.”

Wooooooo. Scary!

My girlfriend’s mother recounted one to me just the other day.

“It was 2.20 am, and I was lying in bed with my husband and the phone started ringing. He picked it up and said 'hello...hello,' but there was nobody there. I later found out that my mother died at 2.20 am that night.”

Another scary story!

So what do we believe? Was my mother telling the truth, did her mother really come back and do some heavy breathing and place a hand on her back just to “reassure” her she was ok, or was it all in her mind? As my mother didn't have a chance to say goodbye to her mother, did she secretly want her mother to tell her it was going to be all right, or did her mother, free of her earthly body come back and place her hand on her? What about my girlfriend's mother? Was it just coincidence that phone rang at 2.20 am, or did her mother use the spiritual operator to make a “silent call” to her? I'm sorry, I can see I have now placed the seed of doubt in your mind and you are not sure what to believe!

Again and again, these kind of stories come up, reaffirming to us that there must be some truth in there being another world. But we don't hear *that* many stories. There aren't millions of these ghosts around all the time, touching people on the back and calling them up, and a lot of people die *every day*! So what's really happening here?

Some people say that when we see ghosts it is because they are trapped between this world and the next, unable to continue their journey to the next world for some reason. Some people say we hear or see strange things the day our loved ones die if they haven't had a chance to say goodbye to us. There are many explanations.

Some of these apparitions are obvious hoaxes, and some are apparently very real. I do not want to believe or disbelieve any of these stories because I have never seen a ghost with my own eyes.

One thing I do know, is that energy cannot die, it merely transforms, and if we are energy, then of course, we cannot die (in the physical sense yes, our bodies are only machines with a fairly short operating life). But we must not get caught up in belief of a spiritual world, as belief comes from fear.

Let's try the ouija board!

How many people round the world have tried the ouija board (*a board with the alphabet on it; used with a planchette to spell out supernatural messages*), trying to contact dead relatives? They sit around the table, light some candles and turn out the lights, waiting in trepidation for the phone to be connected to the other side, sitting in silence, filled with fear. They ask a question and all of a sudden the glass starts moving and a message starts arriving via the inter-dimensional teleprinter!

I don't know why people want to do it, but people want to get some message back from “the other side,” just to prove that there is an afterlife after all. But it all seems a bit clumsy don't you think, what, with a glass moving around on a table, and three letter messages being spelt out, a bit like the medium who asks the audience: “Is there anyone here who has lost a relative whose name begins with the letter A?” Magically, someone's dead husband's name was alan! What are the chances of that?

I'm sorry if I am taking this all a bit less seriously than you would like me to, but that is the reason I am poking fun at you and all of this nonsense! Life is a joyful affair. If there is a spiritual world, should it not be even more joyful than this land, now that all who have passed on are free of desire, greed, fear, and hate. What do you think?

So can I ask you why we are so scared of ghosts, or even the idea of ghosts and spirits? Surely being

contacted by the woman you were married to for fifty years should be a happy occasion, even if she does just drop in through the wall to visit you!

I'm sorry, but if life is funny, then why can't the supernatural world be funny? Why do the religious people treat it all so seriously? If there really is a soul, and there is a god and there is a next life, we should be happy about it; joyful even, that we are going to be free of this body and we will be able to roam the cosmos in an ethereal body without having to pay the gas bill anymore. Surely that is something that should be celebrated?

But it isn't projected like that by those in charge (religious organisations). This afterlife thing is projected as a very serious affair indeed, as we can see by the huge churches, temples, and mosques they erect, and by the obedience they demand in return for eternal salvation. If you don't obey then you can expect no less than eternal damnation in hell! So we must look closely at this together, because the religions rely on fear to get you to conform to their way of thinking. We must break through this, and try to find out the truth of it.

It doesn't actually matter if there is a soul, ghosts, or angels; what is important is to understand ourselves, our relationship to the universe, to nature, to water, to the animals, to the trees and see that we are as one with them.

We are the rocks and the sky and everyone else, there is no separation, no division between anything. There is no other world, there is just the whole. Other implies division. Do you follow what I am trying to say here? In describing ghosts or angels, or god or spirituality, we are separating ourselves from the universe, which is everything. Our blood is not our blood, our minds are not our minds, our skin is not our skin, it is part of the whole – all seamlessly inter-connected. It is time we accepted this, and stopped trying to prove that there is another, the other is us and we are the other.

So next time you talk about being a “spiritual person,” please realise that by labelling yourself, you are separating yourself from the whole.

The definition “spiritual person” means nothing, except maybe to impress others that you are in some way better than they are, that you are concerned with matters which are much more important than the lowly business of living. It is merely a projection of your mind wanting to become something more than it already is. Give up the illusion, and accept the wholeness that already exists. Everything is perfect.

[Back to Index](#)

Stress

1. *(psychology) A state of mental or emotional strain or suspense*
2. *(physics) Force that produces strain on a physical body*
3. *Difficulty that causes worry or emotional tension*

The one thing we will all probably agree on is that life is stressful. We have all suffered from stress at one time or another, and some of us are stressed all the time. But why should we be so stressed? And anyway, what is stress?

As we begin our discussion, let's take a moment to consider how we are feeling right now. Do you feel tense or anxious? Is there something on your mind that's bothering you? Are you having relationship problems, money worries? Well hold them in the back of your mind, and for a short while, just let go. Allow yourself to become fully immersed in our dialogue, for that is all that is important now.

My father always told me the reason I was so stressed all the time was because I had no money. My therapist said I was so stressed because of my dad! But even when I had no money worries, and I had resolved the issues concerning my father's parenting during my early years, I still found that seemingly unstressful situations were making me incredibly stressed.

I went back to another therapist and asked him what he thought. He suggested I was suffering from anxiety (*(psychiatry) a relatively permanent state of worry and nervousness occurring in a variety of mental disorders, usually accompanied by compulsive behaviour or attacks of panic*) and I had to admit to him that several years before I had suffered a series of panic attacks.

"Ah Ha!" He said, "I think we've found the reason you are so stressed!"

And although I didn't like to be labelled with having a mental disorder, in the back of my mind, I was secretly pleased that there was a technical definition for what I was feeling. "Hooray," I thought, "I'm not going mad, I've got a disorder!" Anxiety disorder to be exact. After several intensive sessions, I came out feeling a lot better. I still got anxious occasionally, but on the whole, I was fine.

What he had done, he said, was to lower my base stress levels. To help me imagine it, he drew me a graph. "That line towards the top is where your old stress levels used to be. Now if that is your base stress level, and you encounter a stressful event, it's going to tip you right off the scale into panic" He then drew a new line towards the bottom of the graph, and said "that's where your base stress levels are now, so if you encounter a situation where you would normally get hyper-stressed the peak of the stress will still not tip you over the edge into panic."

I wasn't sure I understood all this, but from what I could gather, I was now going to be less stressed (or anxious) in my daily life. Magically, it worked! It didn't resolve my money worries or "fix" my whole life, but I now knew I would at least be able to handle situations without going into sheer panic. That was a great turning point in my life.

But that's enough about me and my worries! What about you?

You may not feel as anxious and stressed as I did, but given that you probably don't live on a peaceful mountain retreat tending your crops surrounded by pure serenity, I'll take a guess that you probably live in a highly urbanised society (or close to one), and go out to work every day in order to pay your bills, feed and clothe yourself (and your family if you have one). You may have credit cards, a hefty mortgage, and direct debits (*system for making regular payments directly from a bank account*) coming out of your ears! In fact, I would say that most of your life is spent managing money.

So can I help you? The answer is probably not! You see, the price you pay for having a consumer lifestyle is stress. Do you know what I mean? For having a comfortable lifestyle you must pay. If everyone didn't work this hard, there wouldn't be so much stuff. So, unfortunately you are stuck.

You are trapped in a capitalist consumer society driven by greed for more. You want more? You're going to have to work longer. You want fast internet? You must pay. You want to go out for nice meals? You must pay. You want to jet off somewhere sunny? You must pay. Even the rural farmers who may not think they are caught up in all this must pay. They must pay because they are providing products to the society. So what's all this capitalism about anyway? Is it really the cause of my stress? Surely not...

Capitalism

1. An economic system based on private ownership of capital

The protesters always blame the system, but *we* mustn't blame the system, after all, it was created by Man. To understand it, we must look to ourselves. So before we can say that private ownership of capital is evil and that capitalism must be destroyed, we must think about what it has done for us.

First, it has given us the freedom to be inventive, and create jobs, and wealth for the people without the interference of the government. Owning capital (*wealth in the form of money or property owned by a person or business and human resources of economic value*) can't be a bad thing. After all, why should the government control who has what? Capitalism allows individual freedom of expression, freedom to build wealth, for the individual, the wider society, and the country (levied in the form of taxes).

It has helped people collaborate on projects from all over the world, resulting in the invention or creation of products that the stale environment of government control could never hope to achieve. And look what has been created in such a short time.

Most of us (even people who complain that they have no money) have somewhere comfortable to live, with central heating, warm clothes and a job to go to every day to provide all the bolt-ons that make modern life so exciting, like satellite tv, internet, mobile phones, laptop computers, holidays by plane, and endless shopping for stuff we want but don't need. So before you start complaining about the evils of the capitalist society, take a good look around you, and see what has been created by you, and for you. Because remember, you helped to build it too.

Would you really like to have the government control everything you say, do and own as happens in strict communist societies? I'm sure you don't.

If you read Karl Marx's communist manifesto, you would probably think to yourself: "Actually this seems like a good idea!" But unfortunately, like all good ideas, they are implemented by Man, with all his ambition, and desire for power and wealth. Pretty soon, you find the utopian society you hoped to create is now full of inequality, with the few owning the most, and controlling the many. That just seems to be how it goes. And capitalism is no different.

It is like a pyramid with those at the top controlling everything and the wealth and status gradually filtering down to the widest point. The base. That is where the workers sit. They are the ones who provide all the labour necessary to keep the show running. In communism that is where they would stay, but with capitalism, the world is their oyster! Instead of struggling to climb the (deliberately) slippery slope to the top, which, under government control, would just result in you sliding back to the bottom (sorry, sliding back to equality). With capitalism, you just start your own pyramid!

Now you are at the top, and everyone else is underneath you. Of course, you will have to work very hard, you will have to have a better product, and better business strategy than your competitors, but if you play your cards right, you will not only stay at the top of your pyramid, but can takeover other people's pyramids! This is the joy of capitalism. No one is forcefully kept down in order to ensure "equality," which as we have seen with communism, is just a myth circulated by the powerful to dominate the weak. Their pyramids involve them sitting at the top, surrounded by barbed wire and soldiers with guns, with you at the bottom. Some equality.

But capitalism is only a system, one that was touted as being a way out of poverty for the masses by the Scottish economist Adam Smith, who, in the eighteenth century, advocated private enterprise and free trade. One man, one idea. And on the other, we have Marx, who comes up with a new system 100 years later, touted as being a way out of poverty, based on abolishing private ownership. The two systems went head to head, and now in 2008, most countries have adopted the capitalist system, or are heading towards it. Smith 1 – Marx 0

A new future?

It is incredible what the idea of one man can achieve, don't you think? With every system, there has to be an idea, and ideas start usually with one man. But don't worry, I'm not going to start promoting any new system that will "free man from oppression," ideas have caused enough misery as it is.

But one day, I am sure someone will come up with a new "way" forward, and as long as the powerful can see benefit in it for themselves, they will ensure it becomes widely adopted. We must always remember that communism was forced onto the people, and so was capitalism. By who? I'll leave that up to you to work it

out...

“So if capitalism isn't the answer, and communism isn't the answer, what is the answer?” you ask.

Well, unfortunately, there is no “answer,” as with all systems they are run by people. And if people like what they get from the system then why would they (a) want to change it, or (b) want to change themselves? Lots of people have benefited from capitalism, just as the few benefited from communism.

“So,” says you, “let’s stick to the one that has benefited most people.”

“Hear, hear” say the crowd.

And capitalism is installed as being “the only way forward.”

But like an election with only two parties, the choice is somewhat limited, wouldn't you say? And that's normally what happens, isn't it? Conservatives vs. the socialists; Capitalism vs. communism. These are your options. You must choose one of them.

“But why must I choose one of them, I don't like either of them. Isn't there a third way?” you ask.

“No, there isn't.”

Of course, these days, even the capitalists are starting to come up with ideas for “social businesses” where the business is in business to do some good in the community, or co-ops (*a jointly owned commercial enterprise set up for the benefit of the owners*) are set up, but the underlying theory that the political and economic system runs on, is capitalist. So maybe one day, some clever social theorist, or economist will come up with a new book on how to run the world with equality and wealth for everyone. It will become widely adopted, and eventually one man will sit on top and the rest will work for him, or the system. And so it will continue. Round, and round, and round.

But whose really to blame for all this? The system, or you, for blindly following it?

I'd have to say, unfortunately, it's you. You are a member of the most intelligent species on earth, yet you blindly follow someone's whimsical idea! Do you not know that it is ideas that got us in this mess in the first place? And what a mess it all is.

Idea

1. *Your intention; what you intend to do*
2. *A personal view*
3. *The content of cognition; the main thing you are thinking about*

Now before you start, I am not about to blindly criticize ideas. Ideas have solved many of Man's problems (and caused as many, sorry). When ideas are limited to the bottom steps of the pyramid – whatever system you are in – they merely help solve limited technical problems, whether they be social, financial, or commercial; it is only when the ideas originate on the top steps, that things start to become worrying.

“Hey! I've got a great idea, let's start a new religion!”

“Hey! I've got a great idea, let's go to war!”

“Hey! I've got a great idea, why don't we set up a new economic and political system”

“Hey! I've got a great idea, let's not have any more great ideas!”

You see, when ideas are created at the top level, the person at the top uses their influence, their will, or soldiers to enforce it. He is the great man; the great leader. His ideas must be listened to, people should follow his ideas; after all, why else would he be on top?

Let us get this straight. Ideas are created by thought, which in other topics, we agreed was limited. Ideas are never created by insight, as insight is just insight. So why do grand ideas always cause misery for everyone and everything? Because, as they arise out of thought, which is just the accumulation of experience, knowledge, and memory, they are never “well thought out!”

How can something that originates in the “me” possibly have thought out all the connections and the consequences of the idea? If you start from “me,” then you obviously have a vested interest in the idea. You would not implement something that hurt you either financially, physically or emotionally, would you? So an idea can never be for the benefit of all beings in the universe.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Our whole world is built on ideas, there is no escaping it. Actually, I've had an idea! Maybe the reason that the animal kingdom gets on so well without us is that there are no ideas! No lions standing up and saying:

“Now listen everyone, I've had an idea that will benefit all of us. What we are going to do is to share the feeding ground more equally so everyone gets enough to eat”

“But lion, there is already enough to eat, why do we need to change it?”

“Because, I say so,” growls lion.

You see, there is no such thing as a good idea or a bad idea, just beneficiaries of the idea. But in the end, no one benefits. There is just suffering. Sometimes the result of the idea is financial suffering, sometimes psychological, sometimes emotional and sometimes physical.

Do you follow what I am saying here?

Capitalism is an idea, communism is another idea, but the end result is suffering for all concerned. But we are human, and we can't stop having ideas, that is one of the great beauties and curses of having such a big brain, capable of so much complex thought.

The only way we can stop having these grand ideas, is to give up all desire on power and control over others. It is the only way out of this mess, where we have Man fighting Man over land and money, and destroying our natural habitat for profit. We may not have created the system of capitalism, but we are sure taking full advantage of it to benefit ourselves. We love being able to work hard and enjoy the material benefits of our labour.

Thanks to the way the system is set up, all you have to do is give your labour to it, and you will be rewarded with wealth. You don't even have to be at the top of the pile to enjoy it, you can be anywhere in between. But you must compete for it. You must have your own self-interest at heart at all times. You must forget compassion for all beings, and think about yourself, your needs and your desires, always, if you want to taste its riches.

Be careful though; once you join, you are trapped forever, constantly in a state of acquisition; for it is only through the acquisition of more material goods, and money, that the system can survive. If you do not desire a new tv or a new car, or a bigger house, how is the tv manufacturer, car manufacturer or builder expected to satisfy his desires? How are his employees to fulfil theirs? It is a constant movement of give and take. You give your labour and your time and you take material gains as the pay off.

But what happens when the body says, “I can't cope with this anymore. I thought this game was fun in the beginning, but now I want out.” I'll tell you what happens. Your body ends up competing with the system to see who will win!

Are you ready for all this, caveman?

We may have come a long way financially, technically, and artistically since the days of our cavemen ancestors, but in universe time, not long has passed. What's a few million years in a universe that has been going for billions?

If we are to believe that we evolved from the apes, sometime ago we came down from the trees, had to adapt to our new environment, started walking on two legs, were forced to look for food elsewhere, finally discovered fire, developed simple tools for hunting, were forced to wear animal skins for protection against the cold climates we wandered into, had to compete, and then collaborate for food with other tribes as the population grew, eventually invented the wheel, and then a long time later, someone had the bright idea to start agriculture. We domesticated several species of animals, started specialising, settled in one place, built a wall around it, and someone proclaimed themselves the leader. And the modern city was born. Fast forward 10,000 years and here we all are; living in cities, ruled by leaders, competing, and fighting for resources. What's changed? Well, intellectually we have changed a lot, but biologically we are still the same animal we were all those thousands of years ago.

Stress has always existed, not as a hindrance to man, but as an asset, to help motivate him succeed in surviving. And even 10,000 years ago, all we were doing was surviving. Even when we started to trade with other nations it was about trading one resource you had, for another you did not. Pure survival. But that's not

what life is about now.

Thanks to the industrial revolution, and backed by a capitalist economy, we are mostly secure in our survival needs. Most of us have sufficient food, shelter and water, but we have been offered something more enticing. We have been offered the chance to compete for as much as we could possibly imagine in the world. Untold gold, diamonds, money and success could be ours if only we give ourselves to the god of greed, capitalism.

Remember, we don't need all this stuff. If we look to the monks of any religion, you will see that they live happily with a basic meal, basic clothing, and basic accommodation. After all, that's all we need to live happily. They do it to free their minds from attachment, and desire to the earth, but it doesn't matter the reason. The fact is, they do it, and it's no hardship. One could say they actually had an easier life because they are not subjected to competition.

But we don't need to compete. We don't need to be rich. We don't need to be successful. We don't need all the latest gadgets. We want them! Something in our mind clings to the idea of being rich, probably because we see how the rich live. People respect them, people cook for them, clean for them. Why wouldn't you want it? We see how the kings and queens live, and the god of capitalism says, "You don't need to be a king or queen to have it all, you just need to believe in me."

The god of capitalism

You may think it is strange, but that's what it is. It is something we believe will lead us to a better life. It is exactly the same thing people are looking for in their spiritual life. A better life. Except with capitalism, you don't have to wait until you are dead. You can taste the riches while you still live on this earth.

So believe you do, and every day, you pray to your god for more money, a better car, or a bigger house. The god answers that you can have it all, but first you must do his bidding.

I decided to interview a well known successful business man about life...

Him: What did the cavemen know about living? All they were doing was wrapped up in goat skins, going out hunting every day so that they could eat, they had no intelligence and they knew nothing about the world. Now I have it all. I have a beautiful home. I have a successful career. I have plenty of money. I have great knowledge. What more could I ask for?

Me: I don't know, what more do you want?

Him: Well, I've had my eye on a boat, an ocean going cruiser, nothing too flash.

Me: Why do you want it?

Him: Why? Well because I've pretty much got everything I need now.

Me: You mean you want?

Him: Whatever. But the point is. I am so much more than my ancestors. They would have been very proud to see what I have achieved!

Me: Which is?

Him: I am rich and I am successful. What more could you ask for ?

Me: Do you not think that there is something more to life than just money and acquiring things?

Him: Sure there is. I love golf, and I love going to the theatre, and I'm taking a course in ancient history now, all made possible because I worked hard.

Me: So is that what people have to do. Work as hard as they can? What if they don't make as much money as you have, what if they aren't able to start their own company or get promoted? Won't they feel bad about themselves, that they are in some way worthless because they are not measuring up to rich people like yourself?

Him: Look. In today's world, everybody has the ability to make money. Heck, I didn't even go to college and look at me! If they don't make it they are either too lazy or too stupid!" (chuckling)

Me: But doesn't all this ambition come at a price? Doesn't all this becoming something better than you are cause a great deal of stress?

Him: Sure I get stressed. I'd be a liar if I said I didn't, but it's all part of the job.

Me: So even if you suffer incredible stress with trying to become rich, trying to pay your bills on time,

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

fending off credit card companies, having your relationship suffer, it's all still worth it?

Him: Hell, yes. Of course it is. If you want to become rich, there's always a lot of stress.

Me: But what if you don't want a stressful life?

Him: Then you shouldn't live in this country. Stress makes the economy go round. It's good for the 'spirit'.

Me: So if I don't want to become rich would I have an easy life?

Him: I don't see why you should have an easy life when we're all stressed!

Me: What I mean is, if I don't want any part of this would my life be simpler?

Him: Of course it would be, what a stupid question, but let me ask you a question. 'Why would you want a simple life when you can have all this?'

And he's right. Why wouldn't anyone want a sports car or a swimming pool? They're nice things to have, but not at the cost of living your life in constant stress. You see, when you think about it, biologically, we're not ready for the life our ideas have created. We are used to our bodies being under stress as a tool to help us find food, but this has gone on way beyond that. With the psychological and physical stress we are under to just keep up with this society, our bodies have gone into meltdown. It's the stress equivalent of hunting 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It's no wonder people turn to alcohol as a "de-stresser." It has surely saved many people from having (and caused many people to have) nervous breakdowns.

We are, at best, simple hunters, who have had the unfortunate burden placed upon them of a mind that craves more than it needs. A mind that has taken the simple art of competing for food into all out war for as much as it can gain. Maybe in another 10,000 years we will have the biological adaptation necessary to live in this world of stress, but what would be the fun of that?

Stress is the fun of the chase, but this time we are not chasing an animal, but material wealth. As it has no way to satisfy us biologically like a meal could, we keep chasing after more and more, for you see, the desire for wealth can never be satisfied. It is not a natural thing. It is not a natural drive. It is invented by Man, and for that we must pay the price.

So, no, I am not going to give you any tips on stress reduction, you can pay your therapist for that, or go to a yoga class or take tai-chi! Stress reduction is not about learning yogic breathing or doing meditation, although it may give you a break from competition. Stress reduction is not about re-aligning your city self with your natural self by going on retreats, although they may help temporarily.

Stress reduction is only about one thing; and that is the realisation that the god of capitalism is a false god. He can no more help you to achieve happiness than I can. Once you let go of this longing for a better life, he will disappear. And you will be free to choose the life *you* want.

*And as we let go of the god of ideas and the gods of ambition and success,
we pay tribute to them, but acknowledge that their time has come.
They were good company while it lasted, but now we must move on.
Let us not look back.*

[Back to Index](#)

Success

1. *An event that accomplishes its intended purpose*
2. *An attainment that is successful*
3. *A state of prosperity or fame*
4. *A person with a record of successes*

Humans have always been successful, haven't they? If they hadn't, you and I wouldn't be able to have this discussion. From our earliest beginnings (apparently) in the trees in africa, through to standing on two feet for the first time, and eventually spreading north to europe, and east to asia; we have overcome great difficulties such as wars, famines and disease, and we are still here.

Other species have fallen by the wayside. They have become extinct, never to reappear on this earth, but we keep going. In fact, we get more and more successful by the day. But could all this success have gone to our heads, could the most successful species on the planet finally cause its own demise? We shall see.

From an early age, it was drummed into me that success was all I should be striving for (after all, no one strives for failure). “Study and pass your exams, get a good job like your father, and you will be successful like him.” And successful he was. He managed to climb through the ranks of office paper pushers, to become a managing director, employing a couple of thousand people worldwide. He provided a nice house, plenty of money, and private education for me. As a role model for success, he was it.

“Work hard my boy and you too can have all this.”

Unfortunately, it didn't impress me all that much. Why try to be successful when I already had it all!

My parents were most displeased with my attitude. They cajoled me, got me into private study lessons, arranged interviews, in fact they tried everything to help me become a successful person, because you see, that is what is important in life.

I never did become successful in the way my parents wanted, maybe because in my heart I knew they would leave me some money or a house; but deep down, I just couldn't see why we all needed to be so “successful.” I didn't want the adulation of others, or to have power over several thousand employees, and I certainly wasn't interested in making millions of pounds. I just wanted to enjoy my life and have fun – something that was seen as frivolous by my parents.

So what is success? Biologically, success is ensuring the reproduction of the species. Physically, success is having enough to eat, having warm clothing, shelter, and a mate to reproduce with. That's it. Nothing more. The rest is only psychological desire.

So why do I need to be more successful than this? People would say that without ambition, we would be no better than the animals, but given the state of our minds and the planet, I'd have to say that at the moment, we are in a lot worse shape than the animals.

Oh he's very ambitious, he wants to get right to the top

Climbing, climbing, climbing, that's all we ever do, isn't it? We are always on our way to the top, we are never satisfied with what we have and what we are. In fact even when we get there, we just can't stop climbing. When we eventually reach the social summit, and there is nowhere left to go, we invent new ways that not only put us even further above others, but make it harder for people to topple us off our “throne.”

This ambition engulfs us, and takes on a life of its own. We are so desperate to be successful, which in reality is having more than others (more status, more money, more possessions), that we will do almost anything to get there, even kill other human beings.

But none of this is personal they will tell you. It's just business. The business of being so ambitious that you will climb and trample on anyone who gets in your way. They show no concern for anyone else, although if you questioned them about it, they would say that it blatantly isn't true, and of course they care, but we can see the truth of it, you and I.

The ambitious and successful amongst you may have constructed some slick counter arguments just in case you are challenged on this.

“Listen, if people weren't ambitious, and gave up wanting to be successful, do you think that people would have electricity in their homes by now, or be able to get fresh produce whenever they wanted? What about healthcare? If people weren't successful do you think we would be able to vaccinate millions of people against potentially lethal diseases?”

But what I am talking about is not the need to cure people with disease, or supply them with electricity for cooking and heating (all of which is run by ambitious companies), I am talking about you, the individual,

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

needing to be ambitious, to be successful in your life for personal gain. It is rare to find someone who does something out of unconditional love for everyone and everything on the planet.

Everyone has ambition, even the monk wants to be a successful meditator, only his ambition is to reach god, to find enlightenment. None of us are free from it. You see, it's not solely about money or possessions but our need to climb, to get somewhere, to get more knowledge, to discover more things. We are all ambitious. Because our minds are wired that way.

Victory is mine!

I find it hard to talk about war being “successful,” but that is precisely what happens when one army overcomes another. They are the winner of the struggle. They have defeated their enemy – the evil one, and they can stand high on the hill, and declare “*victory!*” at which point everyone cheers.

After the second world war, the leaders of the western world declared victory over germany and japan, and, oh, how the crowds cheered, and waved as the troops passed through the streets. It was a very happy affair. The campaign had been successful.

But success is not something I would call the deaths of countless millions of people, even if it was for my “freedom.”

“You are ungrateful” I hear you cry. “My grandfather gave his life so you could be free.” But I am bound to the blood that was spilt for me. I am bound to the soldiers that tore apart flesh. Did they do it for me? No. They did it because our successful leaders did not want to be controlled by other successful leaders.

There is no right and wrong in war, all it does is create misery, and suffering for all involved. After all, you are only seen as the one in the “wrong” if you are on the losing side. “But we didn't start it,” I hear some of you saying, “we were only doing it, to protect ourselves and to free the people who were under the rule of a tyrannical dictator.”

But the germans didn't see it like that, they thought they were doing the right thing. It would have been hard for the leaders to get so many people to kill on their behalf if the people didn't think they were in the right.

The only aim of each of the countries involved was to be successful, not to create a peaceful harmonious world where all of us live in balance with nature. You only have to look around you now to see that it changed nothing. Sure, we are not ruled by germans, russians, or japanese, but war still surrounds us. Misery still surrounds us. And that misery is caused by ambition, the need to be successful, whatever the costs.

Let's go into this more deeply shall we?

My leaders tell me I am free, because they defeated an enemy on my behalf, but their definition of freedom is not mine. They tell me I am free to think and do what I like (as long as I conform to their laws). When I don't conform, I will soon find out that this freedom they are talking about is given, or loaned to me temporarily, and is not actually a human right. Do you understand?

The leaders want to be successful: they want to be the most successful leader on the planet, and they will stop at nothing to get what they want. Whether economic success, or military success, it doesn't matter. I am a mere pawn in their ascent to become successful, and if I am killed on the way, whilst fighting for “freedom,” then so be it. What matters is victory; reaching the summit.

But if my success as a human being has been dependent on others being killed so I can live in a country free from tyranny and oppression, I don't know if I want to be part of it. Tyranny and oppression are just the methods of ambition.

The freedom fighter

Imagine you live in a country that is controlled by a military junta or dictator. You are not allowed freedom of speech, you are brainwashed, and you must conform or go to jail, so you decide to free yourself and everyone else. How do you go about it?

Well, you have three methods available at your disposal – peaceful protest, civil disobedience, or fighting.

You have seen that civil disobedience has worked in other countries, but here in your country, the military

are under orders to kill anyone who is disobedient, so you ask for help from another country to supply you with weapons. They also want rid of the leaders in your country, so they agree to help. You raise an army, and march on the capital.

For several years, there is terrible bloodshed. Women, children, and the old suffer most, and most of your troops are killed along the way. But you will not stop until the last man dies. You will get your freedom whatever it takes.

Eventually you get help from another country, which sends in troops. They kill the remaining “opposition” soldiers, or force them to surrender, and you arrest the leader (now ex-leader) of the country. Victory is yours! The people cheer! The troops pass through the streets on their tanks waving to the grateful people like celebrities, and you execute the ex-president for “crimes against humanity.” There is a democratic election and you are installed as the new president. You speak to your people on the day of your inauguration.

“My people, we have fought long and hard for this day. Many of you have been wounded or lost loved ones during the battle for our freedom. But our day has come. You are now free from the tyrannical and evil president who made you suffer so much (lots of cheering). He is dead, a new day has dawned, and you have freedom. We will rebuild this country and regain our status in the world. We shall become powerful and never again will we let those who seek to control us have their way. Our day has come...”

Blah, blah, blah. And so the cycle begins again.

You start your new job having climbed to the summit through the ambition to “free the people” and you are now on top. You have spent the last few years fighting your way to the top, killing and maiming, all in the name of freedom, but what makes you so different from the person you replaced? Oh, maybe because you added the word “freedom,” you think it sounds better; but you are both the same. You will do anything to achieve your ambition. Success is paramount. Just like the man before you.

What cost success?

Maybe this ambition (*a strong drive for success*) stems from the time when man was a hunter, when the need for survival was the only thing driving him, and success meant (a) getting enough food to eat, (b) defeating enemies and predators, and (c) staying alive long enough to pass his genes on.

Now, most of us have plenty to eat and with modern medicine, we all live much longer and so have plenty of time to procreate. There aren't many enemies and no predators to speak of, but somehow this biological hard wiring is still with us, and it is causing immeasurable suffering on a global scale. The problem is, most people don't even know they are suffering.

This ambition is causing Man to behave in ways which are not only not beneficial for himself, but for the rest of the planet as a whole.

Ambition is cutting down rainforests, breaking families apart, killing innocent people, digging up the planet, addicting people to everything, polluting the skies.

So whatever anyone tells you, *you* are *all* you need. Everything is already in you. You are already successful. Do you follow? Thanks to the biological drive to survive by your ancestors, here you are! You are a wonderful human being. Filled with love. Why do you need to be anything else? Do you need a title, which is meaningless, or a large office, or people bowing down to you, showing you tribute and respect to be more than you already are? Do you need to control people, to show you are more than you already are?

The more ambitious you are, the more you separate yourself from others, the more you are divided. You stand, not grounded, but as a precarious rock on top of the mountain that takes little to knock off. Remember, there are several billion people below you just waiting for the chance to take your place.

This ambition is just psychological longing to be more than it already is, but when look deep inside, you will see that being successful is just a man-made concept. You are already a wonderful human being. All this climbing, and then nothing. What's the point of that?

[Back to Index](#)

Suffering

1. *A state of acute pain*
2. *Misery resulting from affliction*
3. *Psychological suffering*
4. *Feelings of mental or physical pain*

Life is suffering, as some of the ancient religions have taught. Everyone must suffer here. It's your job, but don't worry, the next life will be better, or if it's not, definitely the afterlife. Sorry, could someone explain this to me? I mean in plain english, where I can understand why everyone must suffer.

Of course, there are probably a million religious or philosophical ideas as to why life is suffering, but I'm not buying into it, and neither should you.

Physically, I had a normal childhood. My parents looked after me well, and I didn't want for anything materially; but when my father left us, I felt lost and abandoned. I couldn't understand it, and neither could my mother. She went into a deep state of depression, and I struggled on through my schooling; but I was still alive, well clothed, and warm in the winter.

Throughout my adult life, I have suffered from anxiety and panic attacks, but not at a conscious level. One moment I was fine, the next I was having cold sweats, shaking and feeling the need to escape anywhere.

Through close self study, the development of awareness, the use of positive imagery and self talk, I have managed to transcend the suffering in my mind that has caused me to finish relationships, leave countries I was living in, and run away from jobs. I now accept that this mental illness (because that's what it is) was a part of life, and part of living, and perhaps the price I had to pay for having such a large complex brain (as we all have).

When we talk about suffering, most of you will associate images of children dying of starvation, populations devastated by flood and war, and images of people living in extreme poverty. Although these people are suffering terribly, the suffering is caused by their external environment, something they could always try to escape.

The suffering I want to talk to you about is not physical, but it is also not through mental illness. This is daily suffering, brought about by thinking. Suffering that cannot be escaped from. You cannot run away from yourself, after all, except through perhaps killing yourself, but why go to all that bother when the answer may just be a question away...

“How's life alan?”

“How's life? I'll tell you how life is, it's utterly shit! I hate my life.”

“Oh, sorry for asking.”

So when asked about how your life is “doing,” what are you basing it on? Financial and personal success in business? The prettiness of your wife? The size of your house or car? The envy your friends show you? Have a good long think about that and I'll be back to you in a moment...

The problem is, we look at how other people are doing, and then we compare ourselves to them. If our best friend is successful and happy, and we aren't, we then think there must be something wrong.

Stop Suffering NOW

I'll tell you how your “life” is, like mine, it's just perfect. Remember, we are not comparing anything here. You are alive and living on a wonderfully abundant planet (compared with, say mars, ooh, sorry we're not meant to be comparing!). It's only when you start thinking that things start going wrong. Where desire and greed rear their ugly head, where you bring in comparison and start to think, “jeez, I'm really miserable.”

I have one thing to say to you. Unless you are incarcerated in a mental hospital for your own and others protection, this is the life you have created. You are the creator of everything. There is no point blaming everyone else for the situation you find yourself in. It is only through thinking you have started suffering, which is mental anguish. After all, physical suffering is through torture, malnutrition, lack of water etc.

Some monks actively pursue this kind of physical suffering in order to attain enlightenment through fasting, or self flagellation (*beating as a source of erotic or religious stimulation*), but I don't recommend it! If you want to lose a bit of weight, go ahead and stop eating for a day or so, or if you fancy a bit of erotic pleasure get someone to beat you with a whip, but suffering for religious reasons is pointless!

When I set off on my journey of self-discovery, I thought that that kind of suffering was to be encouraged, after all, we slovenly sit around watching tv every night drinking beer, and generally getting fat, so in order to be different to the masses, fasting and a strict simple lifestyle were a must.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

The lifestyle of a monk, I concluded, was where I was headed; a strict diet served in a simple bowl with lots of serious meditation and being serious. Only through this path could I attain enlightenment, leave this feeble earth body behind, and join in with the rest of the enlightened ones as part of the universal consciousness! After all, that's what the other monks are trying to do, get out of the cycle of suffering, and do a little bit of praying for the poor souls left behind.

After a while, I began to think this was all a little bit selfish, and a little bit pointless. Why would I have to punish my own body in order to cleanse my mind? Couldn't I do it without subjecting myself to a religious institution where the first lesson you learn is that all life is suffering? I thought it all a bit negative and decided to go my own way!

Several years went by, and I was still "suffering." I began to think that maybe these monks were right after all, so I returned to a retreat to do some serious thinking. "Why am I suffering," I thought. And then it came to me: "I thought," that was the key to this! Why couldn't I see it before?

Without thinking, life is just as it is. The trees blossom in the spring and the leaves fall in autumn. Every day the tide turns. The mountain is still the mountain. Water is water. Sometimes it rains, sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes I am happy, sometimes I am sad. Sometimes the weight of the world is on my shoulders, sometimes it isn't. Sometimes I make money, sometimes I don't. Water is still water, and every autumn the leaves fall from the trees. I can see why the monks want free of this life, maybe it's not exciting enough for them!

That's when I decided that all this "life is suffering" was frankly a load of old crap! If you think life is suffering, chances are you will create a life that is suffering. Come on, we're supposed to be the most intelligent species in the universe, it's not that hard. You normally get more of what you think about.

If you think life is suffering, then in all probability, it will be. If you think all is perfect, then it is, do you follow? So after reading that, "how's your life? Shit? Or just perfect?" In fact, it isn't either, life just is. How's your thinking?

So when I ask you are you suffering what is your answer?

Don't beat yourself up with a whip, or fast for days on end; start to use your intelligence. If life was meant to be suffering, how come it's only you suffering and everyone else isn't? The monks would say that everyone is suffering, and they are just living in an illusion by denying it, but we don't need to buy into that; that's just their opinion, after all. How do they really know that life is suffering?

Sure, some people may be unhappy, or have no money, no job or no car, or be oppressed by a vicious dictator, but that has more to do with the society we have created than anything else.

When we see people starving on the tv, we agree that, yes, they *are* suffering, but not because it is part of a divine plan, but because their economy is dead, the country is in political turmoil, and more often than not, there are too many of them for the land to support.

Do you think our distant ancestors were "suffering?" They may have had to scavenge for food and fight off attackers, but that has more to do with the natural world and how life was back then. You did everything you could just to survive. It is only now when we have a relatively abundant harvest of food that we all have the time to wonder if we are suffering or not!

So I ask you again, are you suffering? You still have no money, no job, no prospects. But If you have some food and a little shelter you are off to a flying start. Forget about your job, that's unimportant. When you need to, you will create the job you want. Remember there is only you in charge here. This is survival.

What would our cavemen ancestors do? Sit around twiddling their thumbs, questioning the nature of suffering whilst going very, very hungry? I think not. You, and only you, have the power to create what you want in life, but now is not suffering. Having a job may ease some money worries and make your life easier in the financial sense, but if you think you are suffering then you will. Do you follow?

Your life is perfect already. Once you understand that, the rest will start to fall into place; but until that time, you will still believe that life is suffering. "Why does he have a better job than me?" "Why is his girlfriend prettier than mine?" "Why does she have a better group of friends than I do?" "Why have I always got all these bills?" "I want a better job, I want a better life."

Remember, there is no such thing as a "better" life. Life is just life. It goes on all around us and doesn't

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

care if we are suffering or not. Do you understand?

Water is water. The trees shed their leaves in autumn. The flowers grow in spring. The trees shed their leaves in autumn. Water is water. Life is life.

There is no such thing as suffering. It is not real, it is an imaginary concept created by a mind that is constantly grasping for more, constantly striving to gain more status, more money, more happiness, but the thoughts your mind gives you, those are the real illusion.

So give up the illusion of suffering, and enjoy every minute of your life. It's a wonderful planet (better than mars or the moon: sorry there I go comparing again), full of such joy. You just have to wake up to see it. Those who are caught in the belief that they are suffering just can't see it. But *you* can. You can go out today and experience life as it is. Even if you have no job and no money.

Remember you are in charge of the creation process. So go out there and *create*. Let's just say that suffering is at an end.

The universe doesn't suffer, does it? The universe is everything we are, and we are everything it is. If it doesn't suffer, why should we? It is just another idea put forward by religions to keep people enslaved to them. You and I are free. Let's enjoy ourselves!

[Back to Index](#)

Suicide

1. *The act of killing yourself*
2. *A person who kills himself intentionally*

*What great violence is this
What incredible suffering
What sadness
What mind that turns on itself
and in the end destroys its own existence*

I don't know if you've ever known anyone who has killed themselves, I have. He wasn't a close friend but I knew him from the local pub. He never drank that much really, but I had a beer with him the week before he died. He seemed normal, although he said that people were watching him, the police were tapping his phone, and that there was some kind of conspiracy against him. He kept himself to himself pretty much, but I wouldn't have said he was on the brink of attaching a hose to the exhaust of his car and gassing himself to death, something he did the following week. That was it. The end. Death. And for him, maybe peace.

Back then, I had no knowledge of the human mind. It wasn't something that interested me a great deal. I had my job, my girlfriend, my own problems, and to me, he was just another guy drinking in the pub. So when he said people were watching him and tapping his phone, I didn't make any connection that he may be suffering in his mind – that the feeling people were watching him, or conspiring against him may be a symptom of schizophrenia (*any of several psychotic disorders characterized by distortions of reality and disturbances of thought and language and withdrawal from social contact*), or some other illness of the brain.

You see, in every other capacity he was a regular guy. He had a job, a car, liked music, and the way he explained that the police were tapping his phone sounded, although unlikely, quite plausible. After all, strange things do happen.

I only wish I knew what I do now. I wish I could turn back the clock, and get him some help (because help is available), and save him from carrying out the faulty instructions of a diseased mind. One that has made all the right connections in so many respects, but has one faulty connection. One that enabled him to use his human body and mind to do the one thing that humans are programmed not to do – terminate their own lives.

If terminating your own life was actually a program option in life, the human race would have been wiped out thousands of years ago. Our natural drive is to survive at all costs.

How many stories of courage and bravery have we heard over the years, where people involved in terrible accidents have dragged themselves many miles to a hospital and survived against all odds? The human is programmed for survival, and anything that goes against that natural drive is an error.

When people hear of others committing suicide, they say, "But she seemed so happy, I can't believe she did it to her family. What about the children?"

From the initial shock of hearing of someone's death, comes the accusation that what the person did was a selfish act, without a thought to the family she would leave behind, but suicide isn't like that.

If the natural drive is to survive, what drives people to terminate themselves? These are not people who want to die. Their brain may be telling them they should kill themselves, that it's the only option left, that they should do it now, but can't you see, this is a faulty brain that causes them to think like that. It is not their own thought, there is a physically anomaly in the brain that allows the person to turn on themselves.

Could *you* kill yourself? Right now?

You have debts, a failed marriage, no job, a court case coming up. It seems the only option is killing yourself; but killing yourself is not that easy. If I sit with a knife ready to slit my wrists or my throat, could I actually carry it out if my mind was working correctly?

Everybody has debts, and problems with relationships, these are just challenges in modern life, and in the end, even if you feel at the end of your tether, there is hope, because you are alive! And whilst you're alive, you can fix the problems. Debts are just debts, and if you can't pay, you can't pay, simple as that. If you have no job, you look for another one. If your marriage has failed, so have a billion others, there are plenty more people with whom to start a relationship with.

Life is an adventure: sometimes you're up, sometimes you're down, and talking to anyone about a problem makes it seem half as bad, but people with a few problems don't kill themselves.

I believe there is evidence that shows that most people think about suicide at sometime in their lives, even for just a second, but the pull of life is so strong it's enough to silence these fleeting thoughts. People who drink heavily may kill themselves, but that is because the chemicals in alcohol actually affect the brain in a physical way. Suicide requires the brain to have made the physical connections that permit the body to harm itself.

Fleeting thoughts in the imagination are just that, imagination, and how many of us can honestly say that

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

we've had what we can only call "crazy thoughts" or "weird ideas" at some time in life? I know I have, and most would be too embarrassing to even discuss with you here! But they pass quickly, and you get on with the business of living. The brains of people who commit suicide must be wired differently, if only at the crucial time they decide to kill themselves. If everyone who had a problem in life committed suicide, there would be nobody left on the planet.

Let's compare two people for a moment to see which one would contemplate suicide. First, let's take the successful man who has lost everything, his wife, his home, his job. Everything he worked for is gone, he is facing court on charges of fraud, and his life seems at an end. He is miserable, and desperate. The second man still has his wife, although he has no water. His country has been at war for twenty years, his children were raped by soldiers, and he scavenges just enough to eat to stay alive. He is miserable and desperate. Who would you think is more likely to kill himself?

While you ponder the question, let me tell you a short story.

Last month, a friend of my girlfriend decided to kill herself. My girlfriend said she had no idea her friend was unhappy. She didn't drink much, was always helping other people with advice, and just two days before she decided to do it, was talking about how much she was looking forward to Christmas. Then she did it.

She swallowed forty pills, cut her wrists, then casually walked out of a sixth floor window. Amazingly, she is still alive, thanks to the wonderful doctors who saved her life, and is making a full recovery. Some of you may say that if someone wanted to die that much, she should have been left to get on with it, after all, she didn't give a thought to the family she was leaving behind, nor for the expense and effort in saving her life. But do you know what? When she woke up in hospital, she couldn't remember anything, and she asked the doctors: "Was I in a car accident?" She was diagnosed with schizophrenia.

Three weeks later a psychiatrist told her what she had done. She could not believe what she was being told, as she had no recollection of the event.

She will now have a different life from that which she imagined as a child. Medication may calm her, and make her less psychotic, but it will always be with her.

Are humans the only species on earth to kill themselves?

The brain is a complex and delicate instrument, and it all needs to be wired correctly for us to function normally. Given the complexities of the brain, it is surprising that so many of us are able to function at such a high level! There are statistics galore on suicide, showing higher rates for men in a certain age bracket, or for women of a certain race and a specific age, or increased suicides in different parts of the world at a specific time of year; but the truth is, these are just statistics.

According to reports, about a million people globally are recorded to kill themselves each year, and compared with the world population of six billion, I'd say that isn't a bad percentage. Given the stresses that are put on us to achieve at all costs, the fact that people manage, either to work through their problems with a friend, counsellor or other support service, is very positive.

It is always terrible if someone actually ends their life, but we have to accept that once they are wired for suicide, it is virtually impossible to stop them unless you get to them in time. The fuse has been lit, and unless you can disarm the bomb it will go off...

So who is likely to kill themselves in the world apart from those with a diagnosed condition such as schizophrenia? Is it the man who has lost everything or the man who has nothing?

First we have to look at the society we live in today, and what it is wired for. One word: Success. The whole world is wired for success, and let's face it, not all of us can live up to expectations can we? Success as a wife, success as a mother, success at school, success in business, social success. Everything we do is geared towards us being successful. And what if we're not? We're termed a loser, a waste of space, a no hoper, and we are ousted from the in-group.

People want to associate with winners, and if you're shy, had a troubled childhood, aren't well educated, or find trouble "fitting in," you're going to feel pretty low, aren't you? You see everyone else looking "successful," and you can't match up to them. You're an outcast, a nobody.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

So although organisations may bandy around suicide statistics on the type of person likely to commit suicide, or the type of employment that may cause people to take their own life due to stress, it isn't about that. I think we all have the ability to commit suicide if we push ourselves into the darkness of despair, and feel that everything is worthless, and we can't see the point of living; but life is hard. It took several billion years to get us to where we are today, in times a lot harder than we are having now.

I wonder what the percentage of cavemen killing themselves was, back all those millions of years ago? Did it happen? Or is suicide a “new” thing?

Do you think there was suicide before conscious thought, and the development of language, as that may explain why we are probably the only species to deliberately kill ourselves. We have the ability to be aware of ourselves in our environment, we have the power of imagination to feel bad, and feel sorry for ourselves. We can feel. We feel depressed, and angry at the world, and we see no other way out of the situation so that anger starts to turn inwards. The brain, not being able to tell if it is a real threat or imagined, starts to make connections that support this negativity and offers us solutions.

Consider for a moment, the multi-millionaire executive whom everyone respects and looks up to. He is at the pinnacle of his career, but due to greed or inappropriate sexual desires with children, has been caught doing something that no one would expect him to do. They would feel total disappointment in him. He would be shunned; he would be made an outcast of the very society he loved being a part of. How could he face his wife, his own children, and all of his peers?

That fall from success, coupled with anger directed at himself may be enough for his brain to make all the connections necessary to decide to end his life, and save himself from lifelong embarrassment. The same goes for politicians, generals and anyone in a position of power with something to lose. The same goes for children who are expected to do so well at school, but know they will fail.

It is strange to think that the drive for success, or more appropriately, the fear of loss, could be a reason why we believe it is in our best interests to kill ourselves.

In our short example earlier I asked you who you thought would be more likely to kill himself, the successful man who has lost everything or the man with no food and no water. What do you think now?

Can you see that the man with no water is not driven by success or fame, but by the desire to live. The natural human drive to survive. I have no information on suicide statistics in africa, but poverty is not the key ingredient in making the connections, otherwise the millions of starving people in africa would have killed themselves long ago.

Loss of face, loss of position, and loss of respect from your peers are more likely to be key ingredients. You may be depressed that you can't get a job, or your wife has taken the kids and left you, but your life isn't worthless. You are a magnificent human, with the power to do anything in this life.

As I have found out, if I sit having negative thoughts about life, my brain inevitably helps me stay depressed! I know you may find it hard to think of positive things if your world looks grey, but stop for a moment and think of the millions of people in the world who are worse off than you – people who can't eat, get fresh drinking water, or may be oppressed by a cruel and brutal dictator – and try to see how good your life is.

It doesn't matter what has happened to you. It cannot be that bad. Death is bad, life is good, and whilst you're still alive, you have a chance to do something good. You will only be alive on this planet for a few years anyway. If you kill yourself, you are no more than a statistic, time will pass and you will be forgotten like the billions of people who have died before we were born.

Life is great.

If you are depressed where you are, change your environment; never let yourself get caught up in great seas of negativity. Instead of conforming to what others expect of you, or striving so hard for success that you leave yourself a long way to fall, try to experience life at its most simple. Walk in nature, Spend time by the ocean, talk to a friend, talk to a doctor, talk to anyone who will listen. Do not keep problems locked inside so your brain can help you make the negative connections that may end with you turning on yourself.

Love someone. Love animals. Love people. Love nature.

For a man with love in his heart cannot think negatively about the world or himself, but *please* don't let yourself become another statistic. You have so much to see and learn here, and you won't find it unless you go outside of yourself for a moment, and look at yourself objectively.

How bad can your life be? You are alive. Cherish each moment you live. You are special. You are homo

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

sapiens, a human being, the most advanced species on the planet; and like all complex things, sometimes they need a little maintenance.

The way out of every problem is through love, and when you love yourself, the world can throw all the shit at you it likes, and you know what, it just slides off.

Enjoy your life. It is the only one you have, and it's very, very precious. It has taken hundreds of generations to get you here, billions of years of evolution, and two people to create you. No matter what people have done to you (and in some cases, terrible things), take small steps in the direction of *love*. I have, and I can tell you, it's all been worth it.

[Back to Index](#)

Supermarkets

1. *A large self-service grocery store selling groceries and dairy products and household goods*

Everyone's giving supermarkets such a bad rap these days, aren't they? I think they're a great invention. I don't know if you remember the days when you had to go around different local stores just trying to find the goods you needed! If you come from a developing country you may not have supermarkets yet, but hang on in there because they'll be on their way soon.

We used to have to go to the chemists to buy toiletries, the greengrocer for our vegetables, the butcher for our meat, the hardware store for our household mops and cleaning products, and finally, the off licence to buy our alcohol. Imagine having to walk round different shops to buy things – what a terribly old fashioned idea!

These days, mega-marts are everywhere. Huge warehouse type constructions filled with everything you don't need, and need, and there's tons of it. Literally millions of tons of consumer goods. All at LOW LOW prices. There's always a saving to be had. They've thought of everything; some of them even offer their own credit cards, insurance, and loans. I will assume you have actually been into a supermarket and actually know what I'm talking about. They make it so easy don't they? It's irresistible. You just turn up in your car (make sure it's a big one) to any one of the major supermarkets where parking is never a problem – open 24 hours a day in some cases.

You grab your mega trolley, and away you go! First through the veg section, you grab whatever you can – whatever is on special. Oh, look at those beautiful strawberries imported all the way from farawayland!

Through the meat and fish section, taking lamb, beef, cod, steaks, mince, cutlets, and through to the tins, grabbing peas, beans, corn – on to pickles and jams, passed marmalades and marinades, into dairy; 2 litre semi-skimmed x 4, 4 kg block of cheese x 2, yoghurt, make it natural, x 6, mustn't forget a dozen eggs. Dried goods next, here we come, a bag of rice, a sack of spuds. Plain flour, wholewheat flour, rye flour.

Oh damn! Back to dairy, a pack of butter.

Raisins, sultanas, apricots, oh so good, go lovely with my organic 12 berry cereal, mustn't forget my pumpkin seeds.

On to bread, a dozen kinds, morning rolls, dinner rolls, evening rolls, sandwich rolls, oh, and I fancy a cake too. But hang on, where am I?

I'm in the clothes section now. Wow! What a bargain, some socks, some underwear, a couple of t-shirts and I'm on my way. Step up a gear now before the food starts to warm up, and now it's time to chill down, frozen here we come.

Pizza italiano, chicken breasts, bags of chips, maybe some frozen veg, but definitely some ice cream. Quickly now just one more stop, some cleaning products in Aisle 10, no time to lose, the frozen food hasn't got long.

Screech into aisle 7, toilet rolls, soaps and shampoo, and maybe something to turn the toilet bowl blue. In the queue now. Five people in front. Can't they see I'm in a hurry?

I grab some chocolate as a treat, and maybe a celebrity magazine or two. Checkout now. Do I have card? Visa or mastercard? Yes, of course I collect points! Enter your pin, transaction complete. You rush to the car, load up and start up, and a few minutes later, you're home safe and sound.

Unload. Unpack. Unwind.

Anyone got a comment to make? Does this sound like you or anyone you know? Well it should do, because most people do their shopping in huge supermarkets, although there are still a few shops left on the high street.

Why do people go? Because it's convenient and we're lazy. Well, we're not lazy, we are just so very busy, being caught up in our busy lives, that if it weren't for the supermarkets how would we cope? I have heard friends talking about how bad they think supermarkets are, but then admitting that they actually use them all the time, even though they know they *shouldn't*, but they are open late etc.

Let's face it, for us humans with a tendency to laziness, they are one of the greatest inventions of our time. Think back to your grandparent's day, when your parents were young, when the local shops were all they had. They weren't well stocked, and they didn't carry a huge range of products. How did they cope? They didn't have credit cards to pay with so they had to use cash! There were no reward cards to collect points on at mr smith, the grocers. It must have been terrible back then. Come to think of it, they didn't have

mobile phones or cashpoints either!

I'm glad I didn't live back then. Life must have been depressing. Not only was life hard financially, it must have been tiresome going between different establishments just to buy the basics. What do you think?

So let's all agree that supermarkets have been a good thing. They have given the consumer access to a wide variety of products, from all over the world, at a reasonable cost, and as there are many competitors in this market, price has been kept low. They have also provided employment for many people.

Many people have benefited from the introduction of a supermarket to a small town, and there are jobs at a national level, from management to distribution, and extra pickers and packers on the farms to satisfy demand. Supermarkets really are the ultimate modern retailer.

Having used supermarkets my whole adult life without a care, I have to say, that on the whole, I enjoyed the experience. I liked that there were fifteen different kinds of deodorant. I liked choosing from five different brands of baked beans. I liked the challenge of comparing products vs. price. Why was this one so much cheaper than that one? I wonder what the catch is? This was consumer empowerment at its finest.

No longer were we being dictated to about which products we had to buy, now there was a choice and if we liked a product but it was too expensive we could go to another supermarket.

In the uk, in the nineties, there was a price war between retailers which ended up with one supermarket reducing the price of its "own brand" baked beans in tomato sauce (a british favourite) to nine pence per tin. Compared with the leading brand organic, naturally sweetened beans at sixty five pence per tin, this was too good to be true. I know which one I would buy. Do you?

Imagine if there was this kind of choice in your grandparents day! They must think we have got it sooo easy. Which they would be right about. We have, and we take it all for granted.

Let's build a supermarket!

If the retail figures are to be believed, opening a supermarket can be a lucrative business indeed, so that is exactly what I have decided to do and I want you to be my business partners. I assure you a good return on your investment. You just have to go with me on my decisions, even if you find them unethical, or not in line with your values. What? You're not getting cold feet are you? Come on, you *do* want to make lots of money?

"So here it is, the plan for my new supermarket, councillor."

"Ahh, very good alan, I see you have thought about almost everything, I don't see a problem in pushing this through, after all you are creating a lot of employment in the area, and as I've always said, a happy worker is a happy voter!"

"Quite," I remarked, putting the plans away in my briefcase.

Several months later, the planning approval came through. There had been many objections to our proposals – we had expected that. From concerns about increased traffic through the town, to building on what used to be greenbelt (*a belt of parks or rural land surrounding a town or city*) land. People even had concerns about businesses being affected.

We are a little behind schedule, but still on track for the grand opening. The steel frame is going up, and now it's time to concentrate on getting suppliers. We have to have branded products that people recognise but we also have to have the lowest prices around so we will have to drive a hard bargain with the suppliers. It's no use trying to source the cheaper brands from the uk though, so we will have to look further afield. China is a good place to start. What with their massive manufacturing infrastructure, and minuscule wages, we should be on to a winner there. We will have to source from other countries where labour is cheap as well if we want to keep costs down.

There is the problem about storage when we fly all this stuff in, so we will have to create some kind of central distribution area. Where would we find land? A quick call to the local councillor and we were recommended several greenbelt sites that would suit our requirements. We have had a few difficult suppliers but we eventually drove down the price of fresh vegetables with them. They weren't happy, but what could they do? We will be their biggest customer, so they have to do what we say!

With the building almost complete, supplier negotiations finalised, distribution and transportation arranged, it's time for advertising. We have a large budget for tv, radio, and print. We will be sending out

thousands of flyers to local homes and we will have a celebrity to open the store. This is going to be great.

“Nice to see you all here today for the opening of our new superstore, where people will be able to find everything they need under one roof... No need to brave the british weather anymore dashing from shop to shop. This will be a unique, integrated experience! You will never need to go anywhere else, we are your friends now, ready to support you every day with new products and fresh bargains! Did I mention we will be contributing money to your local charities? All you have to do is keep spending here, and we will donate books and computers to your schools. We will also set up an environmental charity to protect the planet...”

“I think the opening went very well alan.”

“Thanks for your support, councillor, we won't forget this.”

“Oh, it's a pleasure, what are your plans now?”

“I can see the future councillor, and it will have our supermarket logo all over it. I want to take choice and low prices to the consumer, wherever he may be... It's time to build, build, build.”

Our supermarket is complete, with more on the way. Profits are soaring. I'd say it's the start of a beautiful friendship my fellow partners, don't you? All we have to do is keep people coming through those doors.

Why do I feel ever so slightly uncomfortable every time I see a new supermarket going up on the edge of town? Is it just a case of nostalgia for the town centre that starts dying as soon as the supermarket has set up? After all, we *do* live in a free market economy. The local traders could have set their own supermarket up, couldn't they?

It's what the people want. Choice and low prices. Choice and low prices. Choice and low prices. Like a buddhist mantra, it goes through your mind over and over and over. Choice and low prices. Maybe a little more like brainwashing I think.

Maybe it's just me. Maybe I can't bear to see desire and greed ruin the local community. Maybe people will think I am being nostalgic (hey, I'm only 38), but wasn't it nice wandering through the little stores in your high street?

“No” says you, the shops were expensive. The choice was limited. The staff were unfriendly. I just like going to the supermarket. It's bright and shiny, the goods are bright and shiny, the staff are bight and shiny, the prices are low (which makes me feel bright and shiny), and the car park is huuuuuge. Why would I go back to shopping in the town? No thanks. Give me the supermarket any day!

Supermarket 1 – Local Business 0

I feel slightly detached from reality when I go through the doors with my huge trolley. There is something disconcerting about the whole experience. Something like being disconnected from nature (and plugged into a different channel – the brainwashing channel).

“Welcome shoppers... Everything will be fine in your life, just listen to what we say... Buy some out of season strawberries today imported all the way from mars, they're lovely. And on special offer today, we have multi-packs of cardboard biscuits. Buy one get ten free.”

You may not have read the topic on “fast food,” which relates to anything we don't grow ourselves, but it was about just picking up food from the shelves without any thought as to how it got there.

Supermarkets are the epitome of separation from nature. Not only is the food presented for you indoors in a climate controlled zone; it is packaged for you in a shiny plastic wrappers, in case it gets contaminated on its journey across the sea.

They have nothing in common with the local farmer any more. Meat doesn't look like meat, it is just a square shape in a container. Fruit and vegetables take up five percent of the available space, and the rest of the space is dedicated to manufactured products. These are products which have been made in a factory by machines. (even the humans working there are machines).

The companies making them are not charities either. They are massive companies dedicated to the pursuit of profit, whatever the cost. They will cut corners wherever necessary to maximise their profits, adding weird and wonderful ingredients to every product. They may say it's to preserve it, but who needs biscuits with a shelf life of one year? Oh yes. Supermarkets.

You wouldn't need all these preservatives at home, because even the most extravagant baker would only bake enough for what they could eat.

Tinned, shrink-wrapped, and “sealed for freshness!” Our ancestors would roll about laughing if they saw what we were doing with our food. Like all products that are made a long distance from the point of consumption, they have to be packaged well to make sure they are not damaged during the transportation process. Funnily enough, this results in a massive use of resources. Plastics, paper, cardboard. Yet the supermarkets only tell you about one.

The great plastic bag swindle

That's right. It's the good old plastic carrier bag. Some time ago, an environmental group got onto the supermarkets for the amount of plastic bags being consumed and soon the supermarkets were chastising the poor old general public about it. “*Save the Environment!*” they screamed. “*Stop using Plastic Bags!*”

Of course, everyone took notice, and, thoroughly shocked that they were personally responsible for destroying the environment, rapidly bought the companies “*bag for life*” in which to transport their shopping!

Have you got one? I've got about twenty, because I always forgot mine when I was out shopping, and having a guilty conscience, was forced to buy a new one.

You can get all sorts of bags in all shapes and sizes. Most are plastic, usually with a picture of dolphins or some other image designed to make you think you are in tune with the earth. Some are made of cotton or hessian, which are a much better image for the environmentally aware supermarket shopper.

Except. Wait a minute. Has anyone else noticed this, or is it just me? It doesn't matter a damn what you are carrying your shopping out in!

“Do you want a bag?”

“No thanks, I'm saving the environment,” you reply as you carry out your plastic wrapped biscuits manufactured 200 miles away, which used electricity to make them, and fuel to transport them, and plastic to wrap them, and cardboard to box them. Ok, so your vegetables are loose in your hands, but they didn't come like that. They were washed, boxed, then air freighted from the other side of the world! It doesn't matter that you hold your mango in your hands without a plastic bag! Can't you see it's a smokescreen, designed to keep your attention away from the real environmental problem, and that is the supermarket itself.

Just think of the amount of energy it takes to not only make all those products you casually toss into your family car sized shopping trolley, but the energy it takes to get them from half way around the world to the shops, and finally to your home and to your table, where they are consumed in seconds.

Stop. Stop for a moment and think what that means.

Our laziness has meant that products we can easily make in our kitchens, or grow in our back gardens, or greenhouses, are being flown around the world. What would our ancestors think of fruit from a tree not being eaten by local people, but packaged and flown 10,000 kilometres to another country, where it is driven around, stored in a cool storage facility, driven some more, spending time under lights, and finally driven some more, stored in a cool storage facility some more (your refrigerator), and then maybe eaten, or discarded. Do you think they would be proud of our “progress”?

Hey everybody, let's buy a ready meal!

Now this is a fairly recent invention. A supermarket interpretation of a takeaway. All it requires is reheating – fantastic! You don't even have to go to the takeaway anymore. Everything you need is in store. In the UK (and coming soon to a country near you), is the plastic lasagne, the rubber indian meal for two, or the two millimetre thick cardboard pizza. Not only are we buying food ingredients imported from all over the world, we are now actually buying our complete meals from a chiller in a warehouse. No more home cooking needed for us humans, fifteen minutes in the microwave, and it's ready to be served.

“Who cares what's in it! As long as it tastes good, it's cheap, and is ready in under a nano-second, I'm happy. I'm too busy you see. I have children you see. I work you see. I...”

What has happened to us? I mean really happened to us? We are the most intelligent species on the planet. We have amazing levels of creativity, yet we have let that go in the one area on which our survival is imperative.

Do you realise that without food you will die? Do you realise that the food that has been processed, reprocessed and reheated by machines, has no love in it? Do you know what cooking with love means, where you put positive energy into the creation of something that sustains us in our daily activities. Do you know what it feels like to grow and harvest vegetables, or to bake bread in the oven, or to take time over the preparation of a meal?

It doesn't matter how rich or successful you are, you need food to survive. But this isn't just about survival, it is about recognising your connection to the earth. That you are an animal like all the others on this planet, yet every day we grow further and further apart. It's almost as if we want to deny all connections to our past; as if we want to say: "See, we couldn't have come from the apes, look how sophisticated and refined we are in our modern civilisation." Yet it is all an illusion. The connection is still there, only less and less people have it.

Less people farm the land now than ever before. Everyone now works in jobs in towns and cities. "You see, I went to university, so now I use my mind, rather than my hands for work." It amazes me that with so many intelligent human beings on this planet, none of you can see what you are missing every day you shop in the supermarket. All our food is so clean and hygienic now, there is no trace left of its origins. Not a drop of soil remains...

Do you even know that food has to be grown? I'm not being funny here but it seems to me that most of us assume that a chocolate biscuit grows in its wrapper on a chocolate bar tree! The number of ingredients necessary to make all of these processed foods is huge, and that means resources. Chocolate has to be grown (in only a few countries) in the form of cacao beans that have to be harvested, roasted, ground and then processed into our favourite chocolate bars, then wrapped and shipped to distribution points. Then it's off to the individual shops, then unwrapped in three seconds and eaten in ten. What a waste.

"But I enjoyed it," you say. "I like chocolate."

Food that takes a second to buy and eat has no love in it. When you stand over a cooker, carefully preparing and mixing the ingredients, then watching it cook in the oven, and finally sitting down to enjoy it; do you feel satisfied? I do. Anyone who has ever done home baking will say the same. It may be more expensive to make. It may take a long time. But it is the knowledge that you have created something which has taken time. Something you have given your attention to. Something you cared for, and nurtured as it was cooking.

Compare that to a frozen supermarket pizza, shrink-wrapped and boxed, made by machines, and heated in the oven for 25 minutes. Is there any difference? Can you still not see it?

Making the connection

I am currently writing this book on a small island in Scotland. The whole island is a retreat and environmental preservation area, and I am volunteering as a chef. We have an organic vegetable garden, but still have to buy in dry goods from the mainland as well as the majority of our vegetables. As a vegetarian I told people I cared about the planet as a whole, whether that be humans, plants, animals, fish, insects, or trees, but it was really only intellectually. I couldn't really ever say that I could feel a physical connection between myself and the earth. Until recently.

A lady came to volunteer in the kitchen who was a Chinese herbalist and acupuncturist. We were talking about healing energies from the earth and the healing energies that came from food. I was interested, but not overly convinced. As a westerner conditioned to needing proof of things, I listened with a little scepticism.

One afternoon when I mentioned I was going to walk over the mountain (the island is two miles long, half a mile wide and the summit is just over a thousand feet) she mentioned I should do it barefoot!

"*Barefoot?* you've got to be kidding!"

Although grassy on the flat, it quickly turned to loose rocks which were pretty sharp, even with shoes on. Everybody else who walked over the top always put their strongest walking boots on (very sensible). But being the adventurous type, I decided to take her up on it.

“Are you coming as well” I asked.

“Sorry, I have other things to do this afternoon,” she replied.

So, equipped with only a water bottle and my noticeably white bare feet, I set off. It was a strange sensation going out for a long walk with no shoes on to protect my delicate soles. As I started walking up the track, it got steadily narrower and more rocky, not large stones, but little sharp ones whose points seemed to find every tender spot on the soles of my feet!

This was no connection, this was agony. I also noticed that due to not knowing where to comfortably put my feet, I felt strangely off balance. I didn't feel like the strong confident human being I was supposed to be, especially as only days earlier had powered up the hill in my off-road trainers! I was suddenly very weak, very fragile, and every short step I took was hard. I wondered whether or not our ancestors traversed the land like this thousands of years ago, or were their feet slightly tougher than ours! I finally reached the top with scratched, bruised and cut feet. They were throbbing. “This is no fun,” I thought, having wished I had brought my shoes with me. I got down the other side three hours later, feeling *very* tired.

“How was it?” asked the chinese lady.

“Fine, just a bit sore” I lied.

“You must be mad, alan” remarked another volunteer. “You wouldn't get me doing that.”

“Do it for five more days” said the chinese lady again, “and you will start to feel the power and energy of the earth; you will feel the rocks pressing the reflexology points on your feet, and the rocks massaging your soles.”

Not one to give in to a challenge, I accepted.

The second day I felt stronger, though moving just as slowly to watch where I placed my feet, and I did notice that the larger stones seemed to massage the very areas that felt painful the day before. Day three, and my confidence grew. I was quicker over the stones, my mind became more alert, although my balance grew worse as I tried to go faster. Day four and I slowed down again. This time it felt like I was going at a more natural pace, my feet naturally started to feel for the shape of the rocks under my feet. The mud I had avoided the day before (and at all other times to stop my trainers getting dirty), I gladly waded through, taking time to savour the luxury of squidding it between my toes (hey it feels good). Day five, and I playfully moved from rock to rock, ever mindful of the placement of my feet. I started to enjoy this new found freedom. A walker in the opposite direction remarked:

“Wow, you're doing it barefoot! I think I'll take my shoes off.” To which her companion replied:

“Don't be stupid, come on, let's go!”

That final day, I took time to think what it had meant to me to be walking barefoot, over miles of painful rocks. What had I learnt? Was it just a good physical challenge, or had I truly learnt the connection of Man to the earth? One thing I did know was that I would never again wear my shoes to walk up that mountain.

Boots seemed so unnecessary. They seemed almost like a barrier to experience, which is precisely what they are. The shoe represents Man's control over his environment. His mastery of nature.

No longer do we have to tread carefully on the earth, we can crash through it without a care. No gentle footsteps, only heavy footprints. I realised whilst walking barefoot that I was made of the same stuff as the soil I squidged my toes in. I looked at the mountain goats and wild horses clambering on the steep hillside, and felt like them for the first time in my life. I was an animal too, and by removing my shoes, it was a symbolic gesture that placed me on equal footing with them – although they seemed a lot more sure footed than I could ever hope to be!

For a short time, I didn't feel part of a dominant species. But it didn't last long. As soon as I had showered, and scrubbed my feet, I lay down with a nice cup of tea and relaxed. Human again.

“Nice story, alan, but what did all that have to do with supermarkets?”

Think about it for a moment. Let the story sink in.

From the soil, grows everything. The vegetables we eat. The trees that absorb carbon dioxide and replenish the world with oxygen. The trees that bear fruit. The grass that grows that feeds the animals that other animals eat. The soil (*material in the top layer of the surface of the earth in which plants can grow*) is perhaps one of the most important features of the earth, yet the more “developed” we become, the more we seem to forget that fact. Supermarkets, and all shops in general have removed the connection, not deliberately, but nonetheless it has happened.

How many of us know where cotton comes from that makes most of our clothes?

We seem to think it is companies who provide everything, but the raw materials have to come from somewhere. It is just a hidden process now, everything is produced behind closed doors, until it is finally unveiled in all its glory in the shop.

It's not just food, it's everything we buy, from clothes to computers; tv's to tomatoes; flat packed tables to packs of biscuits. Everything is produced in the factories. Massive production lines, produced where the labour is cheapest, flown or shipped in, all ready for fast consumption. I fail to see why we need so much stuff on the shelves though.

Oh yes, of course. We need to keep making things to keep people employed, so that people can use the money they earned to spend on the goods that the people spent time making so that staff can get paid and the government can get its tax revenue!

Or maybe you crave this stuff. Maybe you can't do without the choice or the low prices, which if you think about it, is just to encourage you to buy more stuff you don't need.

As we have discussed in other topics, need is purely subjective, save for food, water, clothing and shelter. The massive choice available at prices we can afford (or not) is there to encourage us to spend more. Why do you think supermarkets sell everything?

"I just came in for a bag of carrots, but I left with a new mountain bike for my son, a whole weeks shopping, a new t-shirt and a new cd for the car."

It's too easy. You don't even need to think about cash, do you? You don't need to think, "I'm buying food today, I will take out £30 from the bank, and I won't spend a penny more." We've got credit cards to take care of that now. Who cares if you've only got £30! You can spend spend, spend much, much more than that! Don't worry about it. Take it easy. Relax. You can afford it, you don't need to worry about the price. We're already the cheapest in town and you can spread the cost all around! You're here anyway, why not have a look down aisle 12 - clothing, or aisle 3 - cosmetics, how about aisle 34 - kitchenware, or aisle 18 - garden furniture. You don't have to buy anything, just have a look, it costs nothing to look....

So this is going to be the way of the future, is it? People going into massive warehouses designed by retail psychologists, led around from product to product, tempted until veritably salivating. I want it. Why can't I have it? Look how cheap it is! We won't get another bargain like this again! Let's get it. We can put it on the credit card. Oh, look. There's a buy now, pay in four years scheme at zero percent interest. Who could say no? They are positively throwing the stuff at you. But like everything in life, things that come too easy are never valued.

Can you remember really wanting something and then going out to work until you get it? No. Neither can I. Can you remember saving for a whole year to go on holiday? No, why would you? You can stick it on the credit card and pay later. Everything has a cost, but this has nothing to do with price. The cost we pay with this frivolous meaningless lifestyle is our connection with nature.

If a horse could understand what we were doing don't you think it would find it hilarious? Imagine the animals crowding round to see what these silly humans were doing. "Why are they buying all that stuff? What do they need that for?"

Imagine the animals who eat what they need and no more, doing a shopping run in one of the big supermarkets. "Right, we've got all the grass we need for today, how about an outdoor table with a matching parasol?"

Choice and low prices have hooked into a section of our brain, called "mindlessidiot," where clever humans have realised that they can make a lot of money out of us. The section: "mindlessidiot" resides just right of the amygdala (*part of the limbic system it plays an important role in motivation and emotional behaviour*), and the marketers know just which buttons to press to access it. Don't worry, you don't even know they have you under control, but they do. Not in some conspiracy theory way, but in a real "we don't even have to convince you to spend your money way." You just come in your droves. The lazy man with too much money.

Let's face it, it is nice when you don't have to do anything yourself, isn't it? The less real work that needs to be done the better. That's called progress. That's why humans are number one. We know how to use our minds. We don't have to use our hands anymore.

Except someone is making all this stuff. Someone you'll never meet. He's probably working in a factory thousands of miles away from you (or maybe close to home), and paid a pittance for his labour. He, and

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

advanced manufacturing techniques which use machines, are the reason for your cheap plentiful products. The reason you want them is because you are addicted to buying “stuff” you don't even need.

“We had to work like that in the factories for 200 hundred years,” says you. “It's only fair that someone else has to work in them for a while. They'll get richer, and then they'll get someone else to do their factory work, that's the way it goes.”

Except one day we'll run out of people who are prepared to work for a pound a day. Where will you get your cheap goods from then? You better enjoy this while it lasts, before the earth's resources, or the abundance of cheap labour to exploit, disappear. I wonder which one will be first?

A letter you might want to write...

Dear Supermarket chief executives,

Just a quick note to say thanks for setting up these big stores where I can get all my “stuff” for cheap. I have had a great time spending money I didn't have on products I didn't need, but I think it's fair to say that I've had my fun now, and I'd like it to go back to how it used to be.

You see, I used to enjoy walking down my local high street, going into local shops. I used to enjoy chatting with all the people, it was kind of like a community, where people were specialists in their trade, and I got the feeling that they knew what they were talking about. Sure they didn't have the same range as you, and they were a bit more expensive, but these were local people, who lived and worked in the local area, so they had to earn enough to pay for everything they needed. I had to wait for things like tables to be built, because the carpenter had to make it by hand. He was expensive, but I knew the product would be built to last.

I wasn't going to bring it up, but some of the “stuff” I bought from you didn't last; I think there was some pretty shoddy workmanship going on, but it was cheap, so I didn't complain.

Funnily enough I talked to my local farmer for the first time, and he was telling me that although he didn't have the “stuff” I used to buy from you, it was because it was out of season, and that if I could wait, it would be the most delicious thing I'd ever tasted. He said it'd be a bit more expensive, but I could save up. He wasn't as friendly as your staff, and he didn't have a uniform with a name badge on, but I think he was tired, as he has to work long hours in the fields.

On another note. I'm not sure all your staff are as happy as they make out. I saw some of them walking home in their uniforms, and they looked pretty miserable. Maybe they don't like factory work. So anyway, here's the point of my letter.

I'm sorry to say, but I think it's time for you to close up your warehouse. I don't need 30 kinds of toothpaste, or fruit imported from outside the solar system. I think I'll go back to buying local. In fact, I may set up my own fruit and veg shop. It might not be as big or as flash as yours, and I can't promise to smile all day, and I definitely won't be able to afford all that fancy refrigeration, but it'll come from the local farms in my area, so I won't need to have big lorries – that'll save me a few pounds on the old fuel.

As for flying stuff in, if my customers want a coconut I'm afraid they'll have to fly over to the tropics and get it themselves. Maybe I'll even try planting a coconut tree but I'm not sure it'll take with our weather here in England.

As for selling other products, I think I'll leave that up to someone else. After all, there'll be plenty of room for some new local business, once you go.

Oh, and sorry that you'll lose your job, but you're pretty intelligent, I'm sure you'll get another one and so will the staff. I'll even promise to give some of them a job myself, but you might try to rebuild your empire from my fruit and veg shop; So on this occasion I'd have to say no to you.

yours sincerely

alan orr

You see, that's all it takes to regain control of our communities. Do you want to have a lively town centre

again? Do you want to see local businesses prosper? You have to support them or they collapse. After all, every man needs to eat and have a roof over his head!

Are you prepared to set up a business yourself? Wouldn't it be so nice to have local food for local people! Local products made by local people. Real skills used in the community for the community again, instead of just living in a place and using a massive corporation as your community.

Do I have your attention?

The way of the supermarkets is unsustainable. We cannot continue to live like this. We are so out of touch with the natural world that it is time to rebuild the connection with the earth, and to do that we need to grow local produce and keep it local, or regional. You may think you will be missing out on things, and I am not suggesting that everything you want will be available instantly in every local town, but this will be a big shift. We will be instantaneously cutting down on the amount of energy we use, by not flying, or driving, produce half way around the world.

The more you support local business, the more prosperous the town will be, and the more opportunities will be created by local people. Try it. What have you got to lose? Nothing, and all to gain.

Without this shift, we will soon be so reliant on imported food and supermarkets, that it will be almost impossible to go back. Please don't let it happen. Let us try to make this a success. Future generations will depend on it.

I have made a vow to only use local vegetables and fruit and will be working my hardest to make sure this happens. This is a process, but if we all care about the future of our food and our local communities we will succeed. Every country with arable land and enough water can produce the food it needs for its people. If I want to have exotic fruit, I'll just have to go somewhere exotic.

In the uk, we have become used to eating certain fruits, or used to eating food all year round when some is clearly seasonal. If you are eating strawberries in november, the chances are that they have had to be grown in another country for your pleasure. We need to learn the art of patience when it comes to food. It is not an old fashioned concept.

Most fruit and vegetables are harvested at different times of the year, so if you are eating something out of season, it has either been grown under artificial conditions, or is from another country where it is in season. Wait. It *will* be worth it. We do not have a divine right to eat strawberries all year round. They will be in season when they are in season, after that you will have to wait.

We have become so used to getting what we want when we want that this will be a difficult concept to grasp for many of you. Don't panic when you can't get what you want. You don't really "need" anything in particular. You won't die if you can't get something you used to get at the supermarket, but you will get used to living without it if no one grows it locally, and you can't grow it yourself.

Ultimately, the human being has been so successful, because he has been so adaptable. Allow yourself to adapt. You are a wonderful human being. You are not reliant on chocolate biscuits from brand X, you don't need processed foods from machine controlled production lines. You have great dexterity in your hands to "manufacture" food yourself. Spend some time learning to make food with love again. It's called "home cooking." Not a revolutionary concept, just something that the large supermarkets have been attempting to extinguish in the name of choice, and low low prices.

Ultimately their motives have nothing to do with offering you choice and low low prices, but everything to do with profit. Food isn't supposed to be like that. Food is what makes children grow. Food is what nourishes the brain and the body. Food is a symbol of love. Let yourselves become a part of real food again. Plastic bread versus home baked bread. Hot house tomatoes grown a thousand miles away, versus tomatoes grown in your back garden. It is your choice. Only yours.

I leave it up to you.

[Back to Index](#)

Swearing

1. *Profane or obscene expression usually of surprise or anger*

Warning: this section must only be read by adults over the age of 18. It contains many “bad” words that may offend!

We all do it from time to time. I don't want to, but sometimes I am taken aback by something that someone says, or does, or something makes me very angry and it just comes out. I am not going to discuss the historical reasons why we use the words we do, but let's say that most of the words we use are sexual insults. I would like to break down the barriers on these words with you.

For so many people, the use of such words is embarrassing, and they don't want to hear them mentioned. Parents say "not in front of the children," the television stations do not broadcast programmes containing specific words before a certain hour; newspapers or magazines rarely contain the full word; and the more sensitive folk amongst us are horrified when they hear "foul language" being used in public.

You never hear swearing used by politicians in public, by educated people, in opera, or in fact anywhere in more polite society, yet it is rife in society the world over. Fuck you, fuck that, Fuck off. Have I started offending you? Do you want to stop reading now? Can you bear to hear the words or are you like the children in the playground, been so conditioned to hearing it that it goes over your head now.

"I am writing to complain I read the "F" word in this book I am reading. I have never been so disgusted in my life"

Educators, governments, parents and media, desperately try to protect us hearing these words, but children *want* to hear these words. These are grown up words. It is taboo to say these things until you are an adult, like smoking and drinking alcohol.

They don't want children to start smoking before the age of eighteen, and will actively punish anyone who sells them cigarettes the day before their eighteenth birthday with a large fine. But the very next day, they can start smoking themselves to death with everyone's "legal" blessing.

The same goes for drinking alcohol. No alcohol before you are eighteen! Eighteen being the age when governments, teachers, and parents have decided that you are legally an adult and can make adult decisions; like drinking a substance that, as we have seen in previous topics, adversely affects the human emotional, reasoning and balance system. But now you are eighteen you can do whatever you like. Whatever the cost!

So swear words are something that children whisper in the playgrounds; parents can use when they are frustrated with their children; politicians and media types can use when they're talking off air; and angry adults can use any time they like. What I want to understand is: Why we are offended?

Why don't we want other people hearing these words? Are we afraid we will corrupt society? Do we think the youth will turn to drugs and crime if they hear swear words and start using them? Or is it something altogether more academic? Maybe we want to protect the integrity of our language, and we don't want simple words used to express complex emotions?

Who do we think we are offending by broadcasting or printing these words? Well, there is always a part of society who is offended by something. Someone is always going to complain, or start a pressure group to stop us doing or saying something; but this is for their own reasons, their values, their conditioning by their parents, teachers or media of the time. But that is not what we want to discuss.

We want to find out why words such as shit, piss, fuck, or cunt are so offensive, and why we use them. Some of you may wonder why I've gone to the trouble of printing the words instead of just talking about them. Well, it's the words we are interested in, and our attitude to them, so take a good long look at these statements.

Shit! I've fucked up! Fuck you, asshole! I'm pissed off! You're a fucking cunt! You stupid cunt! Oh fuck!

These are just words, but if you notice, they are all words of sexual nature. Shit and asshole are to do with the rectum and faeces, fuck is a slang term for having sex, piss is related to urine, and cunt is the female sexual organ, the vagina.

Throughout our history, these words have been developing as the lowest form of insult, until we have them in their present form. We generally reserved these words for when we were at our most angry, or upset, or startled, but they have now crept into everyday language to the point that the insertions of sexual words is quite natural in a sentence. Read these following examples.

“Yeah I was really fucking drunk last night really pissed, I couldn't even stand up, fucks sake. I was trying to get in the fucking cab, and my mate, he's such a cunt, he just let go of me and I fell on the fucking floor before I got in the cab!”

“My boss is really pissing me off at the moment! I can't believe he wants me to come in at the weekend, who the fuck does he think he is?”

“Fuck off! I don't believe you! Did you really fuck her? You're having a fucking laugh! You're such a lying cunt!”

How many of you believe that conversations like this go on? Does it seem real that someone who is not actually angry, viably upset, or startled, has used so many swear words? Well, these conversations go on all around the world, without any real reason for using these words apart from emphasis – which on the surface would just look like a lack of language skills on the part of the speaker.

But this is not generally the case now, as in some youth culture, it is now “cool” to speak like this, to gain respect from your peers, and obviously makes up for a lack of education in the language too. Although some people grow out of the use of this kind of language, it is very prevalent in modern adult speech. And adults use it a lot when they are angry, frustrated, happy, shocked, or excited.

Comedians use it to get more laughs, as they attempt to shock the audience. Film directors use it to add more “reality” to films. People use it on the web because they can.

I would suggest that the more educated you are in language, the less tendency you have to use words of emphasis like this. There are many writers and comedians who manage to engage the audience without resorting to swear words, as indeed there are many people who manage to express themselves without so much as a “fuck” or “shit.”

Alan, if you say that word again you will go straight to the headmaster's office

The problem with creating a taboo on something when we are young is that it creates a magnetic effect on the more influenced amongst us. The more I am told it is wrong to say fuck, the more I rebel and use the word. Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, in order to offend the prohibiter. Whether the person banning it thinks it is in the best interest of the child or is just offended by the word, the fact remains that no parent, teacher or educator will have a lengthy discussion like this one with a child. It is wrong, you will be punished. Without ever knowing why!

Children need to know why, they are very inquisitive, and just to be told: “It is wrong!” is not enough. If you were to ask a child or an adult: “Why did you use that word? Could you not find another one to suit?” they would be very surprised, and may tell you to fuck off.

You see, fuck off is a very aggressive statement, one that leads to innumerable fights amongst men. If you said “go away” to someone you didn't like very much, you wouldn't get much of a response, in fact they would probably think you were quite weak and may respond with other taunts which included sexual swear words.

The other use for the word “fuck” as a substitute for the sentence “make love.” “I could really do with a fuck” or “I'd really like to fuck her.” This is another way in which we debase emotion, that we turn an act of love into a physical animal act, more reminiscent of the natural world. It is almost anger. Can you hear it being used, have you ever said it?

Listen again: “I'd really like to fuck her.” There's no love there, this is purely sexual, and it makes the female seem like a cheap object that you place no value upon.

Language is such an important tool in life, we really need to find other ways to express our emotions in the heat of the moment. If your partner really annoyed you, you may say: “For fuck's sake, would you stop bothering me, just fuck off.” This would inevitably cause a lot of hostility, and perhaps tears in the moment. But later, if your partner asked you why you swore at her, and you explained that you were feeling tense after

work, and that she kept pressing you for an answer on whether you would go to her mother's at the weekend, when actually you wanted to go shopping instead, she may say: "Well why didn't you say so!"

We need to use language that calms the situation down, instead of inflaming it; to look for words that communicate true meaning. Using words that are just common insults does not help resolve the situation, in fact it normally makes it worse. The more complex the language used, the more the other people will understand your position, thereby significantly reducing misunderstanding, whereas common insults are highly likely to increase misunderstanding!

Swear words are insults, even if they are directed at one's self, and act to raise the anger or frustration levels of the individuals using them, or those on the receiving end of them. We need to find words that calm, not heighten our stress levels.

Even if they are used in common social circles, humour or film, hasn't the time come when we say goodbye to simple, insulting sexual language and start to use the gift of speech for something more than insulting other people? After all, we are supposed to be the most intelligent being on the planet.

Banning or prohibiting swearing is not the answer, understanding why we use it and then moving on to more advanced speech is the only way forward to a more relaxed, calm state. Of course, some people will use words to intentionally inflame the situation and provoke someone into a physical fight, but that is another topic.

*Fuck You – I really don't like you
Fuck off – Go away right now, I can't deal with you
Fuck it – I've made a mistake and I'm annoyed with myself
You're a cunt – I find you very irritating, annoying and I really don't like you at all
I'm pissed off – I'm upset*

becomes

*I really don't like you
Go away right now, I can't deal with you
I've made a mistake and I'm annoyed with myself
I find you very irritating, annoying, and I really don't like you at all
I'm upset*

Can you see how it takes the instant anger out of the language? Try it for one day. Use different words to replace swear words you would normally use. You will feel calmer and more in control of exactly what you want to say, and you will definitely have fewer misunderstandings.

[Back to Index](#)

Symbols

1. *Something visible that by association or convention represents something else that is invisible*

Symbols are very important to us as humans, aren't they? The symbols themselves aren't the thing that is important but what they represent. They're just things that trigger different thoughts and emotions, but nonetheless carry great power, and unfortunately here we are back at the word power again! The religious symbols are powerful, the political symbols are powerful, and the social symbols are powerful.

Imagine for a moment, the flag of your country waving around in the breeze, or seeing the presidential palaces or the king's castle, or walking into a cathedral – what emotions are triggered as you imagine these scenes? What about seeing the man driving past in his expensive italian sports car? What thoughts are going through your mind at the time? Are you thinking: "Wow, look at that car, I wish I had a car like that, I bet he's rich, I bet he's got a big house," or even "look at that flash bastard showing off!"

Whatever you are thinking, the symbol has done its job! The car is a status symbol, and the meaning that the car (although it's just a bit of metal, and wires) is supposed to convey is "I've made it, I am successful, you should envy me." It's incredible, isn't it? How something so innocuous as a car has some invisible meaning behind it, but it works the same in reverse as well, and if you see a man driving a beaten up old "banger" (A car that is old and unreliable) what do you think of him, what is the car silently conveying to you? Is it conveying that the person inside will be sharply dressed, and be successful, or is it saying this man driving is a bit of a loser, probably earns no money, and probably doesn't care about his appearance?

Unfortunately, you would probably be right in your snap judgement of the man, and that's the annoying thing about symbolism. You see, if you look at a huge house behind big gates with security guards and dogs, what is that trying to convey to you – that the man is modest, and has simple tastes, or that the man is very important and very rich?

So symbols are everywhere, we know that. We also know that most people are using the symbols consciously to convey a meaning of power, and status, and riches, but there are those who use symbolism to convey the opposite. Take for example the dreadlocked guy walking down the street in hemp clothing. Does he have his hair like that because he likes it that way, or is he trying to convey something deeper?

What I see is someone who is silently telling us he is "concerned with the environment," or does not want to be part of the corporate culture, but he is just trying to make a statement so you will know what he cares, or doesn't care about. It doesn't tell us who he really is. And that is the point I am trying to convey to you.

All of these symbols are meaningless until we ourselves attach meaning to them, until our brain remembers what we have been told they are supposed to represent, otherwise a flag is just a bit of material, a presidential palace is just a load of bricks, and dreadlocked hair is just hair.

But we can't be content just to be, oh no, we have to convey a deeper meaning to everybody! We have to let people know that there is more to us than meets the eye. That the pile of bricks represents our nation's power and wealth over others, that the dreadlocked hair represents a man who does not want to be part of the consumer society, or that the monks habit (*a distinctive attire worn by a member of a religious order*) represents freedom from attachment to material things.

The bottom line is, we all want to be noticed! We all want people to comment on us, on our clothes, our cars, our public buildings, our cathedrals. We want people to know that we are different to them, that we are superior, that we are not content with being what we are but need to present an image that "represents" something else! If Man is supposed to be the most intelligent species on earth, I fail to see where the intelligence is.

We are constantly in a state of comparison, albeit, sometimes subconsciously. You see, even the monk who has given up all of his worldly goods, and takes a simple robe to wear every day, is engaged in symbolism. He knows that when you see him, you see, not a man like yourself, you see the robes (*clothe formally; especially in ecclesiastical robes*) and know that here is a man dedicated to the spiritual, dedicated to god. He wants to stand out from the crowd. He knows that if he was to wear jeans and a t-shirt like you (which after all, are just clothes) you would not notice that he was different to you. You would not notice that he was a "man of god," and would merely pass him by.

Do you understand?

But isn't true intelligence where you see that all of these outward symbols mean nothing? That these symbols are the mark of a man who still desires recognition, who wants to be noticed, who wants to stand out? Once you see that these symbols are only keeping us trapped in a state of becoming, as opposed to a

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

natural state, where you just are, the need for symbols, whether status, religious, or political will naturally drop away, and you will realise how estranged from nature we have become.

The symbol, misconstrued

One thing a symbol can never do, is give you access to the mind behind the man who is hiding behind it. How can you tell that behind the fast red Italian sports car, and the designer suits, lies a man who is in turmoil, who has addictions, who has problems with his marriage? The simple answer is, you can't. How can you tell behind the doors of the presidential palace lies a leader, who is unhappy with his life, who suffers from depression and anxiety, who secretly wishes he had chosen a more simple career? You can't. How can you tell behind the large cathedral that the priest is starting to question the existence of God. You can't

Do you understand?

We all hide behind these protective symbols, but the symbols are not who we really are. They are not our thoughts and our emotions, and they are not living, they are dead, yet we carry on using them without a second thought.

I want to ask you a question. If you see a man who is living on the streets with one set of clothes, who is he? Is he a poor wretch of a man who has no intelligence, who has no hope of making anything of his life, or is he a man who having been through the process of attachment, and desire got insight into the nature of all things and decided to live this way? You may say, "No man would choose to live this way," but how do you know? Can you see inside his mind?

The symbol that is being represented is one of poverty and desolation, of sadness – that this poor man has nothing, but in his mind he might be free as a bird, and extremely happy, having seen what can happen to people who are always trying to become something more than they are. He is now happy just to be. But we attach a label to him, and say: "Down and out," we never think to question any further than that. The symbol is speaking volumes about who he is, but it is only who we think he is, do you see?

I have a friend who keeps plastic bags of all shapes and sizes, and washes them out so they can be used again. I thought that as she cared about the environment, this was some symbolic gesture to show how wasteful we all are in the world, but when I questioned her about it, she said, "No, it's because freezer bags are expensive, and I don't have a lot of money." The symbolic gesture of saving the bags had a different meaning to me as it did to her. My understanding of it was environmental, and for her, it was financial. So you see you can never know what's truly going on in someone's mind, and it is the mind we have to understand, not the symbol.

Breaking the symbol

I know we all love our symbolic representations; you have to look no further than art to see it put to good use. "Actually what this hammer represents, is the state's oppression of the people," and that's fine in art, but it is time we started to use our very large minds to see what is behind the symbols in real life, and to deconstruct them; we must challenge our thinking when we see symbolism, and watch our thought processes very carefully, to ensure we are seeing what is really there, and not some invisible meaning.

Ultimately breaking symbols has nothing to do with tearing down the physical, remember that the real symbol is just an imprint on your mind.

*When we see a monk, we should just see a man
When we see a church, we should just see some bricks and art
When we see a presidential palace, we should just see some bricks
When we see a sports car, we should just see some metal and some wheels
When we see a man in a designer suit, we should just see a man
When we see a flag, we should just see some material with some colours
When we see a man lying in the street, we should just see a man*

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Do you understand? Because it is so important that you do. Once we can see that these are just items made up of atoms which are everywhere, the symbol loses its power. A brick is a brick, a car is a car, a flag is a flag, that is all. They have no hidden meaning.

The molecules in the golden cross that the priest carries are just molecules, and they will return to the earth one day, the same as every other symbol. It's time to let go folks. Symbolic meaning is not a universal force, it's just yet another man-made idea. It's time to see through it NOW.

[Back to Index](#)

T

Takeaways

1. *Prepared food that is intended to be eaten off of the premises*

*I want it NOW,
because you tell me I can have it NOW,
and if I don't get it NOW,
I will start to become annoyed. Ok?*

I have included takeaways as an independent topic, as I feel they warrant exposure as one of our main urban food sources. Whether they sell burgers, fish and chips, curry, sushi, sandwiches, mexican, or any other type of instant food, they are all selling products that have been made, not with love, but for the express purpose of making a quick sale to stressed and hungry city dwellers.

I do not blame them for trying to make money, after all they need to make a living, nor do I blame the consumers for buying the food, after all, they are probably hungry, and many miles from home. Let us instead look at the reasons we are driven to eat takeaway food.

For most of us it's just rush, rush, rush – no matter what job we do; whether it's on a building site, a hotel, a hospital, an office, or the boardroom on the twenty first floor. If you live in an industrialised country, chances are you are going to be commuting to your job, via overcrowded motorways, or overpriced, and overcrowded public transport. You'll have to get up early, and come home late, so you probably have a busy lifestyle, especially if you have children too.

Every day has a strict schedule, with work taking up all the daylight hours (or maybe the night if you are a shift worker) for at least five days a week. You need this work to pay your rent/mortgage and bills, and need some for de-stress tools like alcohol and summer holidays. Chances are that, although you might complain about the hours, secretly you probably like the buzz of being so busy, being so important that you never have a spare second!

I for one loved it. I was up at dawn, travelling to the airport, or hurtling up the motorway at the speed of sound to get to an important appointment. I didn't have time for anything or anybody. Quick bites to eat here and there, snatched telephone conversations with my family. "Sorry, got to go, in a rush!" I liked the excitement of always being in demand. It appealed to my ego.

I ate hamburger meals, kebabs, sandwiches, pastries – anything that would keep me fuelled for my day's work.

I'd start off with a takeaway breakfast roll (sausage and egg in a roll) followed at lunchtime by a takeaway fish and chips, or burger, followed at three, by sweet pastries. All of course washed down with the must have ten cups of coffee a day. Don't get me wrong, I wasn't some kind of wired crazy guy, I just did what everyone else did, and I enjoyed it. Why? Because all of it tasted good. Strangely enough, a portion of steamed broccoli wouldn't really have cracked it for me in the morning!

We all have become conditioned to living our existence like that. Work has become so central to our lives that it leaves no time for anything, let alone eating a decent meal. Most of us can't go home at lunchtime for our meal, because most of us work too far away, and anyway, even if we did, we only have maximum one hour for lunch, so how could we think about starting to prepare a balanced healthy meal? Cooking at lunchtime just adds to the already stressful morning that most of us have already had.

So what do you do? You see a shop on the corner that sells you hot food in a matter of seconds, and it's cheaper than buying all the separate ingredients and taking them home and cooking them... and did I mention it's ready in a matter of seconds?

I recall being in burger restaurant in new zealand several years ago, where I overheard the following conversation.

Customer: ...and I'll have some onion rings.

Staff member: Sorry, they aren't ready, they'll be 90 seconds.

Customer: I don't have time, I'll have something else.

I couldn't believe it, I just started to laugh. It finally dawned on me how ridiculous we had become. We had bought into this rushing thing so much that we weren't even prepared to wait for fast junk food. You'll see it all over the world now, people starting to get tense waiting in a queue that will take them maximum five minutes to clear. They grumble about it being ridiculous that they are kept waiting so long. Do you do it? Are you as impatient as I was? Are you used to getting everything you want in a quarter of a second?

Let's just STOP a moment and think. Let us approach this very important topic from a different angle. Let us forget about what is important to you and your busy life, and talk about reality.

Do you know how long it takes to feed a calf that becomes a cow? Do you know how much water, how

much feed and attention it takes to fatten the animal for slaughter? Do you know how much land and forest has to be cleared for grazing? Do you know how much money and time it takes to process the animals, butcher, and prepare them, and turn them into your deluxe cheeseburger?

Do you know long it takes to fatten a chicken in the factory, how much time and effort it takes to slaughter them and process them so you can enjoy them as part of your organic chicken and rocket wholegrain sandwich with a light lemon mayonnaise? How many seeds are sown to grow the crispy lettuce that adorns your burger roll, or sandwich? How many tomatoes are grown? Do you care? Probably not. I can see you are actually very busy and obviously very hungry, but let us continue anyway.

Think about the amount of input that is required to make your really tasty, but probably not very nutritious, manufactured meal that you devour in a single mouthful for a measly couple of loose pound coins in your wallet.

First, you have the millions of calves who are born and raised very carefully to be ground into your burger. Next comes the lettuce, which is sown in miles of fields, to hang limply out the side. Then the acres of tomatoes, and the chickens who are bred in captivity for the sole purpose of providing the egg on your burger, or to make the mayonnaise that tastes so good. And the wheat that is grown in the miles of fields, that goes to the miller to make the flour that goes to the baker to bake the bun, to the potatoes that are grown in millions of acres to make a small chip, to the water that is used to top up the sugar syrup, that came from the cane, that came from the field, to the trees which are cut down in droves to make the wrappers that coat the products for a maximum of a five minutes, to the plastic containers which are manufactured from oil we don't have (phew, that's a long list!). But actually, you weren't that hungry, so the remains end up in the bin, with the temporary containers too. Oh, if you are like a large percentage of the population around the world you won't even put it in the bin, let alone recycle it.

So what does that tell us all about takeaways? That they are bad? That the governments should close them down? No. I'm sure even government ministers are all rushing about so much they have to stop for a takeaway, which you remember, is not just greasy burgers and fish and chips, but anything we consume which comes in its own packaging (recyclable or not).

From the economic view of the consumer, takeaways are a marvel. Hot food that fills you up for cheap. Can't say fairer than that! From a business perspective, takeaways are also a good money spinner, they must be, they're always full, and a lot of them open 24 hours a day. Which brings me nicely onto alcohol. What a fine pair these two make don't they? Alcohol and takeaways.

When you come out of the pub or the club at 2.00 am drunk, tired and really hungry, what better way to ward off those hunger pangs than to stuff your face with greasy pizza, burgers, or any other kind of ready-in-a-minute meals. You don't give a stuff how long it took to grow all the ingredients for your meal, how much labour and transportation was required, how much animal suffering was caused. Why? Because you're drunk, you're out of control and the only thing that will make you feel better is greasy food. You are probably 99 times more likely to dispose of the food you cannot finish (due to feeling queasy or actually vomiting) in the street. You have no self-control left. No self-discipline – alcohol has seen to that.

What lack of respect for all that has gone into making your minute meal. The minute meal that took a year to produce, but ended up soaking into the gutter in one drunken moment on one night.

What kind of people have we become? Who is this homo sapiens who has spent millions of years evolving into the most intelligent species on the planet? When I look at the waste of life and natural resources on feeding a load of drunken youths on the streets, or feeding a stressed employee who has no time to appreciate what went into making his food, it makes me very sad.

For many years, I did exactly the same thing, nobody educated me that it was a bad thing to be doing. In fact, after seeing all the adverts all over the world and knowing that everyone else was doing it, it seemed almost a positive thing. This was a reflection of the progress we had made in the world. Food available through a drive through intercom in less than a minute! Wow! Look how far we had come since the days when we had to put up with mum's home cooking and the times when food was scarce. Now food we wanted was available 24 hours a day at a price we could afford! Surely some modern revolution, this takeaway.

Indeed we all thought so, until health professionals started telling us that high fat, sugary processed food could be bad for us. Really? The takeaways fought back, using a new marketing campaign, and before long, everyone believed that takeaway food was – if not good for us – then certainly acceptable, if taken as part of a “balanced diet.” It seemed that these companies were oblivious to anything else but the sound of money

ringing in their tills, which of course is perfectly acceptable, as they are a business.

No amount of campaigning about takeaway food being bad for our health, or education about the suffering of animals involved in the preparation of this food, or the use of unsustainable resources moved us, the consumer; and why should it? We don't care about anything apart from our pleasure in this precise moment, and the addictive ingredients in fatty foods make sure that our brain craves more.

Can I ask you a quick question? When you are hungry at work, what do you crave? A plate of steamed vegetables, which are full of essential nutrients, or processed fatty foods? Surely as a highly developed species we would crave the former, if anything, but that doesn't seem to happen, does it?

We never crave plain food when we are hungry, because plain (real) food doesn't make the tastebuds go Mmmm (until we re-train them). Only a pastry, or a burger with a sweet sauce or chips with ketchup, or a sandwich with mayo, will satisfy those tastebuds. Of course, you may live in a country that has different types of takeaways I haven't covered here, but you can be sure that the amount of inputs required to make even a sushi hand roll are too high. Fish caught out on the sea from an unsustainable ocean, rice grown in mass fields, seaweed harvested, soy sauce produced, condiments such as wasabi and ginger, transport, labour, fuel, storage, retail rent, electricity, plastics, paper.... Shall I go on?

Whatever the takeaway product, no matter if it is “healthy” or not, the long term inputs are too high to justify the short term gains. Money for the economy, yes; employment, yes; satisfied hunger, yes. To most of you, that seems like a pretty good deal. These are the arguments that all involved with this industry will try to persuade us with.

It is probably the same in the cocaine industry. It employs many people who would be out of work if cocaine production and distribution came to an end. What would happen to those people? How would they feed their families? They would lose their homes... It doesn't mean that cocaine is a positive thing for the human system or society does it? It is just a series of excuses to justify what they are doing. Nothing more. It is the same with the takeaway industry.

There is no point in blaming other people, we all have a personal responsibility to each other, the rest of the animals we share the planet with, and the planet itself. If anything, we are all to blame. How many of us happily eat takeaway food whilst talking about “the environment” and “going green?” This isn't about going green, it's about thinking why we are forced to eat on the move and why we can't eat at home.

Why we happily eat food that has been prepared on a production line by machines is no mystery though. If there wasn't a takeaway industry, the industrialised society wouldn't be able to march at the pace it does. If people are hungry they can't work, and they certainly can't work many miles away from home for as many hours. The takeaway industry, in its many guises, is helping businesses keep us working like machines.

Imagine if you would, a scenario where you weren't able to get food on the go, where you had to eat at specific times at specific places – at home, for example! Or what if you could only eat in a restaurant, because there were no cheap takeaway meals? Without takeaway food, life would change, in my opinion, for the better.

Imagine eating a proper breakfast at home, using fresh ingredients, instead of a rubber muffin and a bucket of coffee along the way. Or a meal at home at lunchtime, when the body still has time to use the energy you are putting into it, as opposed to eating when you come home late at night (in some countries they eat a full meal at lunchtime already, normally in a restaurant).

Imagine if you weren't rushing to work and getting caught up in the mayhem that is commuting. The anger and the tension caused during this morning rush would no longer trouble you. But if you didn't commute, how would you get to work, where would you work, what would you do, how would you pay the mortgage, and how could you further your career? And many other questions!

Some of you must be thinking, “he's lost his marbles this time, linking careers, commuting and takeaways,” but it's time to give it some serious thought. How prepared would you be to do what you do for the company you work for if you didn't get access to food on the streets at any time of the day or night? How prepared are you to sit back and let the massive industry that is takeaways use up precious environmental resources, change the way we eat, the food we eat, and influence the culture to such an extent that their food is all that young people crave, want and desire?

Do you care? Do you care that takeaways are linked to alcohol abuse and drunkenness? That they will serve anyone, in any state; that they only care about the money going into their tills? They know who their

customers will be at two or four in the morning, and they rub their hands in glee. The drunks don't care what they're eating, as long as it is full of animal fat to soak up the alcohol (they hope). The drunks and the proprietors don't care about the litter everywhere in the street. A fair bargain was struck, and both parties go away satisfied. Do you care?

Do you really care?

Would it be so hard for you to give up takeaway food? Would you not prefer to eat healthy tasty, home cooked food instead? Would you not like to see what a difference it could make to your life? Not just for health, but in the way you thought about how you organised your life? Wouldn't it be nice to see our streets free of litter and food waste (which took a long time to grow remember), and free of the tacky neon signs that are on every street. Imagine a street free of the drunks who hang around shouting obscenities whilst gorging on their junk (which took a long time to grow remember), and casually tossing the half eaten food on the floor.

This is all possible. Not by forming a campaign group to close down your local chip shop, or by lobbying your member of parliament, but by stopping going there to eat. It's very simple. If you don't go there to eat, and don't take your young daughter to eat there “as a treat” (I fail to see how eating junk food is a treat. I thought the idea of a treat was to have something better, not worse), and when you begin to realise what you are doing is affecting all of us in a negative way, and become aware of your actions, these businesses will close. People will lose their jobs, but humans are very resourceful, and they'll get other ones.

Let us move forward into an era where eating actually means something. Where we respect the land, and the animals, and we do not just use every available resource just for our one minute of eating pleasure. Food is what sustains us, it is also what sustains every living creature on this earth. Let's stop and think about what that means to us before we rush down to neonville and grab a burger just to fill a craving that quickly comes back. We can do it together.

I have made a vow (*make a vow; promise*) never to eat in a takeaway shop (clarification: a shop who primarily sells food to eat off the premises and packages all food, even if there are seats to eat in) ever again. I have been left very hungry on several occasions, but this has taught me that I need to plan my eating habits more carefully, which is what we should all be doing; not just stuffing our faces at every available occasion, because it's quick, available and it's cheap. We expect that food will be there for us whenever we want it, but we have no notion of how to grow it, nurture it, or harvest it.

Stopping buying and eating takeaways and starting eating more locally grown home cooked food will start to put us in touch with the source of the food. The earth.

[Back to Index](#)

Tax

1. *Charge against a citizen's person or property or activity for the support of government*

There's an old saying that goes something like: "there's only two things for sure in life, and that is death, and taxes," and I think we'd all have to agree. No matter who the government is, whether they're the communists, the conservatives, labour, republicans, socialists, the green party, democrats, christian fundamentalists, idealist workers party, the alternative idealist workers party, or the new reformed christian socialist idealist workers party – if they get into power, they're going to need some cash.

I don't know if you are aware that governments don't have any money. They don't sell anything, and they don't make anything, so they need to get money for their big projects another way – they need to get money from *you*. That's only fair, as you did put them in to power (hopefully, if you live in a democracy), and gave them a mandate (*the commission that is given to a government and its policies through an electoral victory*).

They need money for all sorts of things such as healthcare, social welfare and housing, education, public transport, and defence. There is a department for each of these areas which receives a budget from the treasury every year, which the treasury – surprise, surprise – gets from you. This is commonly known as tax.

The primary tax is income tax, which is a percentage of every pence in the pound you earn. This is a personal tax that everyone must pay and companies also have to pay corporation tax. You'd think that's where it would end, but no, there's a goods and services tax known as vat (*value added tax*), which applies to most items you buy in stores, and any extra money you get from any investments, you also have to pay tax on, right up until you die. Oh, but just when you thought they couldn't tax you anymore, they do. It's called inheritance tax, and it means that if you leave any assets behind to family or friends, tax has to be taken out.

At every stage in the game of life, they will tax you, re-tax you, and then tax you again, just to be sure you were taxed enough. If you count it up you have probably paid tax 100 times on the same money.

Governments are always attempting to show that they are cutting income tax in "real terms," but you may notice that more tax is added onto fuel, alcohol and tobacco. Not because the government is concerned with your health or the health of the environment, but because they know you are all addicted to your cars and your distracting pleasures. Basically, you're all easy targets for the tax man.

So why does he need so much money from us all?

Because the government's got lots to do!

Before you voted them in, they published a manifesto which detailed what they would do for you if they were voted into power. More money for this service, more money for that service, lower this tax, lower that tax. The money doesn't grow on trees, unfortunately.

When the chancellor (or whoever does the budget in your country) prepares the budget, he writes down how much money he is proposing to give each department and on the other side, how he proposes to pay for it. In case you didn't know it, running a country costs billions and billions of pounds per year. Most people don't realise when they see new public roads being built that they had, in fact, contributed to it through their taxes. They also probably don't realise that they are paying for all the failed projects and new initiatives that were quietly disbanded, or new computer systems never implemented after forty million had already been spent, not forgetting the millions spent on consultancy fees and other government "expenses." Phew, I'm getting dizzy thinking about all this money being spent. Imagine it all being laid out in five pound notes – that's an awful lot of paper!

It is well known that governments waste money. I thought they were wasteful in the UK until I saw what was going on in some "less well off" countries, or rather countries run by greedy dictators or even worse, incompetent idiots. At least you know where the money's going with a dictator (probably a personal Swiss bank account!).

They just don't seem to care that the money they are squandering (which on the surface may seem worthwhile projects, just a little over budget) has been given to them by someone who has gone out to work every day and given them a percentage of their earnings.

We all think that the mafia protection rackets are despicable, that someone should be forced to give a percentage of his earnings to the mob in return for "protection," but isn't that what we do every month? Paying a sum for the state to "protect" us (look after our health, our education, our retirement, and a large army to protect us in case anyone invades). They may not be holding a physical gun to our head like the mob

does, but if you don't pay, you'll end up in jail, very swiftly convicted of tax evasion.

Make no mistake. Tax is a very serious business if you are in government. Remember, a government with no money can't govern, simple as that, which makes it all the more surprising to watch all our hard earned pounds go down the drain. It is unfortunate, but with governments, the expression, easy come, easy go, always applies. If the country was a business it would always be bankrupt. A company couldn't keep wasting money on failed initiatives and projects, or blowing millions on consultancy fees. One of two things would happen: (a) the chief executive would be fired, or (b) the company would go under. Simple as that.

I have never thought that paying tax is a bad thing, nor tried to avoid paying it. I figure that if I use a service (the country), I should contribute to it. If I drive on the roads (isn't the road tax supposed to pay for that?), or use the public transport (but isn't it all private now?), or use the healthcare system (which I have used so infrequently, and doesn't cover things like teeth), or use the education system (wait a minute, I'm 38 I don't go to school anymore!), and hang on a minute, I don't have a drug addiction problem, I'm not a minority, I work for a living, and don't need unemployment benefit (actually I'm volunteering), and I don't need housing benefit, and I don't have any children – so excuse me for asking, mr chancellor of the exchequer, but what precisely am I getting for my twenty pence in the pound?

I don't need the services of the army, navy or police as I live on a small island with only fifteen people, and anyway, I don't believe in the idea of an army, as I probably didn't tell you that war has never solved anything, and it's a complete waste of my money and soldiers lives sending them to countries that (a) I've never been to, nor am likely to go to, and (b) because I don't know the real reason why they are there (for world peace probably!).

The more I considered this, the more angry I became. When I am working for money, I pay a percentage of my salary to the exchequer (*the funds of a government or institution or individual*), and I have no idea what it goes towards and why I have to pay for things (a) I don't use and (b) don't want my money to go towards. I realised that the only way for a government to operate, is to tax everyone equally, and use their judgement to distribute the money where it is needed most – after all, that is what you elected them to do.

In a democratic system the power ultimately rests with the people. They are your elected representatives. But even if your government is not elected in a democratic way, they probably still collect taxes centrally, and distribute them to various departments. But as they are undemocratically elected, may favour certain ones – say, the large missile department, or maybe the retired generals department. The only way to be sure your tax money is at least reaching departments that help the people who have paid for them is to work towards democracy. It isn't the solution to all our problems, but at least it's a start.

I'm not giving any money to the army, I'm a pacifist you know!

This idea has been touted around for sometime now, whereby you withhold a percentage of your salary, which is earmarked (according to budget figures) for defence. I was a big supporter of this idea until quite recently when it suddenly dawned on me...

Can you imagine what would happen if we were invaded one day? Who would the army save?

"Hey, I paid for you, protect me,"

"Err, I didn't pay for you, but now you're here, could you save me? I'd rather not die, and I'll back-pay my 5.4798% I should have contributed out of my monthly income to the defence department."

Can you imagine it? It would be utter chaos!

So how do you ensure your money, that you have all worked so hard for, goes to the areas we want to help most? The answer is. You don't. The only way to do it if you wish to follow the existing political process is to (a) start your own political party, or (b) vote for a political party that agrees to spend more money on the issues you care about; but will probably get caught short on their budget and have to transfer money from the "peace and love department" to the defence department. You can't win! Or can you?

The first thing we have to realise, is that no system is perfect. It isn't now, and it never will be. A government is no different. You can't spot reduce your tax contribution, the tax system cannot cope with that. Everyone must pay into the pot or the system collapses. Withholding tax may be one approach, but what

benefit do we get from it? No hospitals, no schools, etc. You may want that if you want a destable and anarchic environment in which to live, but that's not the way forward.

I don't want that. We have come too far to go back, we need to progress. But if we are going to keep this same system, we would be wise to have a government whose primary aims were peace and compassion for all. I think I would be happy to pay my taxes to a government whose motivation for governing was the health and total well-being of the people, not just to make a richer more powerful country. What benefit has that served us? We may have more money, but we are definitely more stressed, less compassionate and more violent. When money rules, everything else is pushed to the back.

Maybe you want to start a party with compassion. Maybe I will. Or maybe, we'll just continue the way we are. But if you aren't happy about where your money is going, don't just complain about it. Do Something.

Make the rich pay more

Everyone keeps going on about the poor old rich. Well, I don't know about you, but if I was rich, I wouldn't be very happy about that.

“Just because I got up early every day, worked my ass off, built a business, gave people jobs, and made a success of myself, in a very competitive world. Why should I, who has done more for this country than most, pay more than someone who has contributed less!” And you can see his point.

He probably does charity work, maybe has a foundation to help disadvantaged children, and maybe even campaigns for world peace. He has a nice car, because he worked for it. He has a large house, because he worked for it.

Answer me one question. If you were doing well, why would you stop yourself from succeeding? If you spent your life trying to improve yourself and you succeeded, why would you stop yourself from earning money? That would seem pointless. The rich man is already taxed more heavily by the government than people who earn less, and he already makes more of a contribution than the poorer people, so why tax him even more heavily? These are the kind of ideas touted around by the “robin hoods” (*legendary english outlaw of the 12th century; said to have robbed the rich to help the poor*) of our time, who believe that people who haven't been successful should be given money by people who have been successful.

A rich man uses no more resources in a country than a poor man, does he? Income tax is supposed to be for hospitals, defence, schools, etc. This is just one more example of people who have less wanting more.

If I am a poor man, have no money or assets, then I complain about the “rich scum” who are taking all the money from the poor. But if I then become a rich man, do I not change my view, or am I happy to refer to myself as “rich scum?”

Down with the government and their capitalist ways!
Oh, but I'll have your money thanks...

I may have told you in other topics that I am volunteering at the moment in a tibetan buddhist “spiritual” community as a chef. I wanted somewhere peaceful to finish writing my book, and was happy to hear I could volunteer a few hours a day in exchange for food and accommodation – seems a pretty fair trade to me. This whole centre, dedicated to world peace and health is staffed, as they say in their brochure, “entirely by volunteers.” As I found out yesterday, this is not entirely true.

Whilst sitting at lunch, someone happened to come in with the mail, and I said to one of the very long term (greater than ten years) volunteers, jokingly:

“Oh, is that a tax return?”

“No,” he said, “it's for my tax credits.”

“What's that?” I asked.

“Well, basically I get about £40 a week, as I only work for my board and lodging, so I am classed as a very low paid worker.”

I was quite shocked by this.

“So, you're telling me that you're not a volunteer?”

“Technically yes, but I work here, so it's only fair I get something. If I didn't claim this tiny amount every week, I'd have to go out onto the mainland to work in a normal job, and anyway the rich government can afford to give me a few pounds instead of spending it on weapons and killing people. I am here doing an important job for the benefit of other people, creating an island of peace, and actually the government sets the minimum amount of money you are supposed to have to live on...”

“So why doesn't the charity pay you? If you are a volunteer who is 'actually working'.”

“Look, I'm only claiming what I'm *entitled* to.”

You see, it all sounds good doesn't it. Rich imperialist government going around the world killing people vs. volunteer in spiritual community building an island community dedicated to world peace, who only wants “a little.” No competition, is there?

“Give him the money, he deserves it, he's working for a good cause.”

He was quite angry when I told him that although he thought the people on the mainland were living an illusion and had miserable lives they were the ones going out to work every day, to pay for him to live on an island deep in contemplation. These were the people who didn't complain, who just got up every morning and went to work – even if they disliked their job. He had the cheek to complain about them, and their ways, and their government.

“But I work for a charity,” he said.

“Then they should pay you, not the working man in the street.”

The conversation ended.

I subsequently found out that most of the “volunteer” residents here were doing the same thing. In my mind there's something about a man who does not contribute. They talk in this community about helping, “all beings achieve peace,” and they meditate on that for hours a day, but what they are forgetting, is that most of the general public would prefer to be on the island meditating instead of trying to earn some money and put something back into the community in the form of tax, which pays for everything we use in a country.

I have known many “hippies” who wanted to start communes, and live in the woods away from everyone else. They have rejected western ideals and want to get back to nature, except they sign on the dole every week, and someone else (whose ideals they have rejected) has to pay them unemployment benefit every week.

But they don't know what getting back to nature means. It's not wearing a loin cloth and rolling around in mud, failing to wash – that is getting back to being an animal. Getting back to nature requires nothing more than a shift in thinking.

Don't complain about your government or your society, then claim money from them, it weakens your arguments somewhat. If you want to complain and moan then do it the right way. Contribute first, that *includes* you, and gives you a voice. Otherwise, don't complain.

You may want to reject modern life, and the society you live in, but please, do it on your own money, oh, and while your at it, don't use the hospitals, the education system, the roads, the electricity, or the water supplies – but by all means use your own.

The man who stands alone free of the ties of society is indeed a brave man, and I wish you luck in your quest. But please don't involve everyone else in your cause (financially that is).

This topic on taxation is not about who has more money, or who has less, and who should pay more, tax is about the whole community (the world) putting up a certain predetermined amount of money for the benefit of others. We must not get caught up in arguments about the rights and wrongs of tax. If the money were distributed by monks would you feel better? Would you think it was going to the right places?

Governments are only made up of people like you and I. They are not from a different planet! They are doing what they think is right for the country, however misguided it may be. You cannot select what to contribute to at this time, but I still feel it is right for everyone to contribute. I just wish it was spent on disarming us, and educating people in the ways of compassion and empathy, instead of on nuclear missiles and education just to get employment. We have a voice, you and I, it just depends if you care enough to use it.

It's ok to help others.
It's ok to pay your share.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

It's what it goes on that I care about.

[Back to Index](#)

Technology

1. *The practical application of science to commerce or industry*
2. *The discipline dealing with the art or science of applying scientific knowledge to practical problems*

To begin this topic, I would like to ask you what the you think the greatest invention was? It can be anything you like. For me, it could be a hundred things – anything from the knife and fork, to the discovery of fire, the wheel, or agriculture. You may be thinking of more modern inventions like the electric kettle, the television, the car, digital music, or satellite television. It doesn't matter what you pick, we will all have our own favourites.

The point is, that over all other species on this planet, Man has been inventive (*used of persons or artifacts*) marked by independence and creativity in thought or action).

The apes are the only other species who also have some degree of inventiveness. All other species, no matter how clever we think they are, are operating on some form of blueprint, a predetermined path, based on how successful it makes them as a species. So we are not talking about Man adapting to his environment to increase the survival chances of the species, we are talking about using the mind in such a way, as to invent items which are not directly related to survival.

So why have people invented things? The question is as broad as asking why does Man do anything. The simple answer is because he can! He has a mind which has developed sufficiently as to ask questions. Complex questions such as “what if?” and “why can't we?” It is precisely questions such as these that lead to inventions, coupled with Man's desire to make life easy for himself and his family.

We have all seen the animals and the birds out hunting for food or grazing every day, but did you know that even if they had the mental capacity to comprehend the concept of a day off, they couldn't have one, as they need to keep looking for food! No two week holidays in the sun for them, no weekends off, just work, work, work. That's exactly what it used to be like for us. Hunter gatherers. Hunting for animals to kill, and gathering berries etc. in the forest. Every day.

*Thanks to inventions
I am human
Without them
I will surely die*

Imagine, just imagine for a moment, that we were suddenly thrown back to those days. How would we cope? We, who are so used to going to the supermarket or pulling something out of the freezer and putting it in the microwave (for clarity, I am using a western example here, as I know in some countries you do not have access to this kind of technology). How would you cope? I know one thing, a lot of us would starve to death!

How many of us know anything about the food we eat? How many of us could identify fungi and berries in the forest? I know I can't, and neither could my parents.

How many of us could catch a wild animal and kill it (without a gun), skin it, and identify the best parts for eating, before starting a fire without matches, and finally roasting it? Please think about this for a moment because it is very important. Can you see why we are talking about this?

It is precisely because of Man's inventions that we have lost some very basic skills. It is all very well having technology, but what if one day, we don't have it anymore? Remember, all of this technology requires earth resources to make, and use -so what if it runs out? Where will we be then?

Many people have said that they are not concerned for the future, because when the earth's resources run out, Man will just come up with more inventions. But can't you see that these inventions are the very things that are disconnecting us from the planet? These inventions have placed us so far away from nature that now we believe we are different from all other creatures on the planet. We cover ourselves in our inventions, surround ourselves with them, talk about them, fly in them, eat them, live them, breathe them. Our whole life is based around technology; Man's discoveries to make life more pleasant and bearable.

Except no other species seems to need them. You may argue that they don't know what they're missing, that they could have such a better life if only they had the brain capacity to invent! But really, what would they do with it? How would you improve a bird's life? How could you better soaring in the sky, free from control, from suffering.

Birds and animals do not need to consider a better life, because they are already living it! They may or may not know they are living a good life, but they are part of the earth, working with thenature to ensure it is kept in balance, whereas we just want an easy life, and we invent technologies to help us with it.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Remember, alcohol was an invention, and look what that does to us. It keeps us as far away from nature as possible.

Everything we do for work and for pleasure is the result of human invention. Everything we see when we look around in our cities is the work of human invention, and yes, I am amazed by what humans have created in the last few thousand years (roads, water supplies, bridges, brick housing, aeroplanes, space ships), but all the while I look around me, I keep thinking to myself: “Imagine if we used this brain capacity for something else rather than to make our lives easier and more superficially pleasurable?”

When fridges and cars were invented early in the twentieth century these would have been considered as, and maybe more, exciting as mobile phones today, and they very quickly became essential items to the human animal.

Bolt-ons and more bolt-ons

Bolt-ons, as you may remember from other topics, are items which I consider non-essential to the well-being of the species. Artificial additions which have become as inseparable from us as our limbs!

I would like to create a list of ten items I feel I couldn't be without now, and please write your own list at the same time. They don't have to be in order of importance.

- Laptop, and fast wireless broadband internet, please.
- Banking (cashpoint and mastercard/visa for paying online etc.)
- Many different sets of clothes.
- Public transport and / or private car.
- Money.
- Electricity and running water.
- Hot water showers.
- Shower gel and toothpaste.
- Flushing toilet.
- House with heating (in winter).

I consider myself to be one who has let go of most modern desires, but I see from my list I am still very much addicted to modern living. How does your list compare?

What do you think the list would contain if it had been completed by someone 150 years ago or 300 years ago? It would have looked very different, I can tell you (only because, apart from money, the things I have listed hadn't been invented).

I am trying to remember what I used to do before the cash machine was invented – it was only invented recently, but now I couldn't live without it. The same goes for a debit card to pay for items without having cash. In fact what would I do if I didn't have a bank? Where would I put my money? Under the bed probably!

It seems to me, that humans don't miss something until they have had it, and then lose it. I'm sure everyone was quite happy without credit cards (invented around 1960) or cash machines. They just went to the bank, stood in line and took out their money, but if you removed them now, there would be an outcry! The same goes for mobile phones, which you will notice, I do not have on my list, only because last week, I decided to get rid of my phone.

I have had one since they became digital in 1995, and give or take a few months here and there, it has been on permanently, quietly receiving text messages of zero importance and loudly receiving phone calls, none of which (over ten years or so) could be considered important or a matter of life and death!

“What are you up to?” “Are you going out tonight?” “Did you see?” “I'll be there in five minutes” Blah, blah, blah. I have wasted thousands of pounds talking absolute rubbish. I used it to pass the time in traffic jams, on trains, in airports, when in fact it was just wasting time, and keeping me separate from the now. Wherever I was, I was somewhere else.

Do you notice that these days? People will be out in company at a pub, restaurant, or even the cinema, in fact, anywhere, and they are engaged in a text conversation with someone else? Everywhere you look in the street, people are talking with someone who isn't there! Anything to keep them distracted from what they are

doing. No one can just sit and have a coffee at a cafe now, they have to be doing something else, like phoning a friend, or texting. They have to distract themselves from living in the present moment.

But it wasn't always like this. In fact, it has only reached epidemic proportions in the last few years, when mobiles have become financially accessible to young people.

So what did people do before they could waste their time talking to people on the move? The same as they did before cars were invented, or the same as they did before fridges were invented – they got on with their lives. It seems very strange to me that we have such an addiction to technology. Maybe it's because we are fascinated by it? I don't know, but one thing I am sure of is that once we have it, it switches something on in the brain that can never let it go.

I'm sure you don't know anyone without a mobile, do you? Everyone argues that they are an essential part of our accessory pack. Parents happily give their five year old children one, just in case they need to phone home. Husband and wives have them in case they need to let each other know that they will be thirty minutes late for dinner. Elderly people should have one in case their car breaks down. On the face of it, it seems like a good idea. Everyone being able to keep in contact with each other, just in case. But all I want say is, what did we do without them twenty five years ago? Fifty years ago? One hundred years ago? One thousand years ago? Was life better or worse without them?

Another great invention is Sat-nav in the car which uses the global positioning system satellites and some nifty software to plot your route. It even tells you when to turn left and right! Once again, like the mobile phone, it's a great invention, testament to Man's ability to be inventive, and like all technology, it's nice to have, but do you really *need* a computerised flight plan for your car journey down to the supermarket? What's wrong with looking at the map?

The more we become reliant on technology, the less likely we are going to be able to cope without it. Whether that day comes or not, we must learn to rely on our own human skills, to use our brains, instead of allowing ourselves to become addicted to the lazy way – something humans are becoming more and more likely to do. Ask yourself what you would do without even one thing on your list. Even better, do as I did, pick one item and let it go. Like your mobile phone! Instead of feeling lost without it, I feel free. The addiction is broken.

So why do you think we felt a need to create all this technology? Is it built into the human to constantly improve, or were these the inventions of people who wanted to make money? Was electricity created so that people's lives would improve, or was it an invention to make money? Was running water in the city invented to help people improve, or as a way to get water to the people in the city so they could work for the powerful men who ran the city?

Why was the mobile invented? For the people, or for the back pocket?

Cynical you may call me, but every modern invention has been created for profit. Try to think of one that wasn't. I am not suggesting a return to the dark ages when we had no technology, just an awareness that the technology the marketers have addicted us to, is unnecessary to the happy existence of the human race.

It facilitates modern cramped city and town living. It allows people to work long hours so they can get rich or make someone else rich, without having to worry about going out to hunt food, fetch firewood, or tend crops. Technology allows for specialisation, and specialisation is where people get rich!

So is technology just another way for people to get richer than their fellow man or could it be philanthropic? Did the great inventors of our time come up with these ground breaking inventions purely for the benefit of other human beings, or did they do it for the fame and the money? I will leave that for you to decide, but know that nothing we have is necessary to our survival, we just think it is. It may take a while to get used to the idea of not having, but like all highly adaptable species. We would adapt.

The monastical experience

I have only spent a short time in what could be called a monastical existence. I was only there as a lay person and had (and have) no intention of becoming a monk, but something moved me in the time I spent there. What really struck me first was the lack of outward attachments. No fancy clothes, yet the clothing seemed perfectly adequate. No cd players or mp3 players, but the silence was in fact more captivating than any

concert. No fancy food, but each meal was delicious. No talking at mealtimes, but the food tasted the better for it...

Most of you, and young people of western culture especially would say “Borrerrinnngg!” which doesn't surprise me. Anything that isn't the newest and shiniest technology is considered boring. Forgetting the religious aspect to monasteries, these are places of contemplation and learning. They give the mind space to breathe, without all the modern gadgets we are addicted to.

They are simple in design, the living is simple, but the thoughts one can generate in the silence, can be incredible! The monks have lived almost the same way for hundreds (if not thousands) of years.

Of course, this simple life may not appeal to you if you live in a city surrounded by constant traffic, noise, bars and nightclubs, fast food outlets, fashion and technology retailers, cinemas, art galleries, museums, fast moving companies, slow moving traffic, and enough neon lights to block out the stars at night, but can't you see how artificial it all is? Nothing we have in the city is natural, it is all man-made. It is all born through invention.

Sure, we may build a few “natural” parks with lakes etc. to make the people believe they have something in common with nature. But there is nothing we have in common with nature anymore, technology has seen to that. That is why all of us, whether we are religious or not, could benefit from spending some time in a monastery, where the only technology employed, is the technology of the mind in action. Where you can start to develop a true awareness of yourself, where you can start to find out who you are, and begin to understand your place in the universe. Of course, you could just buy a meditation cd and listen to it on your mp3 player in the lounge!

To quieten the mind, to be as one with the universe, takes no effort, just silence! You don't have to repeat mantras nor sit in funny cross legged positions, just be. And where better than to just be, than in a place specifically built for people who want to just be? You could just spend time alone in the mountains, or by a stream, but please don't take your sat-nav or mobile phone with you!

Is technology a help or a hindrance?

Any technology that makes humans' lives easier so they can work more is a help to employers, but is it furthering humanity? Are we just using more and more of the earth's resources to enclose ourselves from it? It seems quite ironic! Some of you may say, that without modern technologies we would still have problems in the west from contaminated drinking water like they do in parts of asia and africa, but if society was not organised into such large social groups would we need to pipe it round the country?

If we didn't all work miles from our homes we wouldn't need all the technology to get us to and from the cities. If we lived in small enough communities, we wouldn't need technology to stay in constant touch with our friends, we'd go round and see them.

There are so many reasons why technology is a hindrance, but then again you may see it differently. I believe that technology is the barrier between seeing reality and living in illusion. If you start to become aware of yourself, you will have done something that technology will never be able to do.

*Leave technology behind you,
let space enter your mind.
Finally you will be free,
to discover what's truly inside.*

[Back to Index](#)

Television

1. *Broadcasting visual images of stationary or moving objects*
2. *An electronic device that receives television signals and displays them on a screen*

What a great invention. The television. It allows moving images to be broadcast in colour over invisible waves, and beamed right into your living room, bedroom, or indeed any room you want. You can have cable tv, Satellite tv or Terrestrial tv. You can receive thousands of channels in many different languages. Yes, the tv is really a remarkable invention. There's great drama, comedy, and factual programs. You can watch movies you missed at the cinema, and you can get up to the minute breaking news from around the world. See all the sports live! All beamed directly into your living room. You don't have to do a thing. Just sit there and let yourself be educated, informed, or entertained.

Education. Information. Entertainment

Children rush home from school to watch cartoons; you catch up on the latest soap every night; you all watch the movie at night; your partner watches the car show; you watch the home shopping channel; you both watch the latest blockbuster from hollywood; The children watch the kiddie shows; you watch the nature show; your partner catches up on the day's news. It's time for bed, but there's just one more show, one you just have to watch... And soon, you drift asleep. If you wake up, there's always something on; a commercial, a movie, or a show that's being repeated.

You see, television never sleeps. It's not like it used to be, where the tv station closed down at midnight. It's all changed now. Tv is in your home, even when it's off. You're always receiving. And as soon as you push that button, on comes the news, the headlines, the drama, the comedy, the movies, the serials, and the commercials.

Round and round, you click that remote, until you find something that satisfies. "Ahhh, that's better, something I can relax to."

And that's it isn't it? It's relaxing, even if it's an interesting science program. You don't have to think, you just open your eyes and ears, and in it comes. No effort required. Not like reading a book or studying. This is pure relaxation. It's the one time you don't have to *think*.

The most exciting new piece of television since the last most exciting new piece of television

And the tv companies know it. They know what you want, after all, they control what you see. Did you ever think about that? Who decides what you see? Who decides what *you* relax to? Multinational television companies broadcasting worldwide, controlled by a handful of men, as rich as you could ever imagine, these are the people who decide what you see. These are the people who are in your life 24/7. Do you know anything about these people, their values, or their ethics? How do you know that the content on the news channel hasn't been guided by the political bias of the tv station owner? The answer is, you don't. You don't know anything about them.

Children's tv

Let's discuss the station owners, the ones you don't know anything about. These are the people who decide what education your child gets from television. These are the people you leave in charge of your children, when you're too tired to play with them. While you rest, these people are addicting your children, to the latest craze, the latest game, the latest merchandise from the most popular tv program. They've addicted your child, and now you have to deal with them. They know you'll give in eventually.

"Mum I need the latest backpack it's from..."

"Mum, can I have the new pencil case/lunch box /dvd/game/t-shirt/shoes, they have the logo from my favourite series on them. Mum Pleeeeeeease!"

"Mum, all the kids at school have them, if I don't have them I'll be the only one without them, and no one will talk to me, mum, pleeeeeeease!"

And so it goes on, from what seemed to be just a harmless children's show, now becomes a major

shopping expedition for you every month as soon as the latest craze appears! And if you don't comply, you will see the face of a screaming child who hates you and never wants to talk to you again, until you buy it. Then it's "thanks mum, I really love you mum."

Is this addiction? Have the tv companies successfully addicted your child so young? Well, they do know psychology. They know what works. They know how to make you spend money. Are they smarter than you? After all, you are the most intelligent being on the planet. Could the tv companies have tricked you, without you knowing it? Maybe not. But they know who to get to instead. Your child. He will make you buy the products. After all, you love him and you don't want to see him unhappy. But it's not all just about merchandising.

I'm sure you think about limiting your children's tv time, and making sure they only watch programs designed for their age group. But have you ever considered what watching tv is doing to your child's brain? Sure, these programs seem harmless enough, cartoons or fairytales, in fact some children's programs seem better than adult ones. But by watching tv they are creating addiction, a need, something they can't do without. If your child had never had tv in the house do you think he would miss it? I doubt it.

From the age of two, to the age of sixteen, how much tv will your child watch? Imagine the healthy things you could do together in all that tv time. The one thing tv breaks down is communication between parent and child. Whenever there is a problem with a child, especially a teenager, they retreat to their room and put on the television. Teenagers need a lot of space as they grow up, but retreating to a world which just numbs the brain can't possibly be of any help.

"Quiet mum I'm watching my favourite program!"

"Mum, leave me alone, I'm just watching tv all right? I'll do my homework in a minute!"

Television is all encompassing, all addicting, and once you're hooked, you can't give it up.

Adult tv

Do you think it changes when you get older? Once you have a job, a routine, less physical activity, you're tired after work... You just need to relax! And what's good for relaxing – apart from alcohol? That's right, tv.

It just feels nice to sit in front of the tv, to curl up on the sofa and just relaaaaaxxxxx. It doesn't really matter what's on, although it would be nice if it was your favourite program, and so you flick through the channels on your remote control, seeking anything that takes your fancy, probably grumbling, "there's never anything good on when I want to watch tv." Of course, the program you like is never on when you're in, or it's on too early, or too late.

This is interesting. If we go into "there's never anything good on when I want to watch tv." what this means is that you are merely sitting down relaxing, and the tv itself is unimportant, yet we turn it on all the same, making it a substitute for human company, one we don't have to interact with.

We want to relax, and this is the quickest method to do it. But what would you do to relax if you didn't have a tv? There are many things which are relaxing, but you can't really be bothered can you? You're tired, you've had a hard day...

I watch tv to relax, what's wrong with that?

So we have seen that the content is not as important as the fact that it is there and on, but I hear you saying: "I only watch the programs I am interested in, and I don't turn it on at other times," which is most commendable, but that's not what I want to talk about. I'm sure all of you could come up with numerous programmes that are worth watching, but there's always programs that grab your interest isn't there? Especially if you are interested in documentaries and nature programs.

You can always say they're educational, but these aren't subjects you are deeply interested in, are they? Are you deeply interested in arctic whale watching or deadly snakes, in your spare time? Or are you interested in pre-world war air planes, or the history of world war one? Maybe, but isn't the main reason you

want to watch it is that it has been provided for you by the television companies as entertainment; something you can be interested in but at the same time relax to?

Entertainment

1. An activity that is diverting and that holds the attention

That is what tv is at its best, entertainment – 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year; hundreds of channels, mind boggling brain mush.

How many of you have been motivated to really do something, really change something, really get involved with something, really help the world because of something you saw on tv? Maybe you bought that new power washer on special offer; or the food processor that was advertised as buy one get one free; or maybe you rushed down to the store to pick up the new anti-ageing cream that has just come out, and guarantees you'll look younger.

Advertising

Companies pay huge sums of money to get access to you. In fact, none but the richest can advertise on national television – it is seriously expensive. These companies also pay huge sums of money in producing the tv ads. Why would they do it? Well, even if you don't think you watch a lot of tv you are being exposed to advertising. They make them catchy, with tunes and slogans you remember. You find yourself saying “I like this one,” but you would never admit it influenced you into buying their products, would you? But still, these companies keep on advertising their products.

They advertise shampoo, clothes, anti-everything creams for women, special offers at the supermarkets, and anything that children can convince their mum to buy. Why do you think I say mum? Because advertisers aren't really targeting men with their anti-ageing creams, or their fancy shampoos and hair care products, are they? Who generally keeps hold of the household budget? Women. They're the ones being targeted because advertisers know they love a bargain, and statistically speaking, love to shop.

So, if you're a man, you may not notice advertising as much when it's about ice cream on special, but you will notice when a new car is sexily advertised, or beer is advertised with sexy women on the screen.

If you didn't know it already, advertising uses carefully selected psychology to win you over. They know what pushes your buttons. They know what makes you reach in your pocket and pull out the cash for their products. They know you better than you know yourself, but it all just seems like a harmless bit of advertising, doesn't it?

Let me ask you again, do you really think that these global companies would have got to be global companies if they didn't know how to seduce you with advertising? They don't care if the product they're selling is good for you or indeed anyone, but they do know one thing – they know they've got to sell a lot of it to pay for all that advertising, and make a big profit to keep the shareholders happy.

But why should we let them into our home? We didn't invite them did we?

How annoyed do you get if someone phones you and says: “Hello alan, I'm calling to save you money on your phone bill,” or “good evening alan, I would like to save you money on your electricity bill” Oh how angry we get! “How did you get my phone number! I'm in the middle of my dinner! I'm not interested!” Even if they *could* save us money, we hate that kind of direct sales, the intrusiveness into our lives, don't we?

What about the poor old door to door salesman? Is that a tough job or what? Because if we don't like telephone sales, we certainly don't like real people turning up at our door unannounced, they could be anybody, and “I'm in the middle of my dinner, I don't care what your selling, I'm not interested. Goodbye!”

So let's look at this shall we? We don't like people intruding into our home, either by telephone, or in person even if it saves us money, or they want to talk to us about poverty in the third world. It's our home, our private space of relaxation away from the outside world, and we don't want it intruded upon, thank you very much.

So let me ask you this question. If you dislike telesales, and really dislike door to door sales, why do you

feel comfortable with hundreds of companies advertising their products to you in your private space of relaxation away from the outside world, every fifteen minutes, in the middle of your favourite program, in what we have discussed, is really your relaxation time?

Please stop and think about this very carefully as it really is most important.

You are sitting relaxing, and adverts about fast food, cars, magazines, and supermarket special offers come on, and they float right into your head.

Imagine how you would feel if you received that many phone calls in the middle of your favourite program or several men turned up to sell you products in the middle of the news. I don't need to ask you how you would feel, do I?

But with tv ads it's different, isn't it? For starters, they're not "real" people, although you can see and hear them, and they are not threatening in any way. They're not forcing you to buy their product, they just give you their short message and leave your screens for another half an hour. They're friendly, they smile nicely, the models are attractive, and they wear colourful clothes.

Everyone in advertising looks happy. It's fun and nice and inoffensive, unlike the unattractive door to door salesman, standing in the rain, in his grey suit and mismatching tie, using his well worn pitch, and unexciting voice. Compare this now to the glamour of tv advertising, the catchy music, the feel good voice over. What's the difference?

One word: Entertainment

That's right! It's still entertainment. Remember the definition? *An activity that is diverting and that holds the attention.* You are being entertained, while the message subtly finds its way into your brain. Think about it the next time you are happily watching adverts and the phone rings with some commission only salesperson desperately trying to make a living!

They're both trying to sell you something, but only the tv advert can add the glamour to make selling a mobile phone, or a car, entertainment. That's all it is. And guess what? We buy into it.

There's just one interesting thing though, if you, as an individual, wanted to buy some advertising space for something of importance to the world, say, for example to bring the plight of workers in the third world, or arms trading issues, or criticism of the government, to the attention of the people, and you had the money to do it, who do you think would put your advertisement on national television? The answer, a concrete, no one.

Why? Because they rely on advertising revenue, and they don't want their advertisers to get scared. They want to keep everything running smoothly with nothing controversial to spoil the ratings. That's why you get the same types of programmes all the time. Nothing too challenging, just keep it middle of the road, that's what the advertisers want. Of course, occasionally, there is some investigative journalism, expose of criminals and fraudulent companies, or an award winning report from the war front. So now, if you want to know who the people really are behind the tv companies, you'll have to look to the global corporations. They pay the salaries of the station employees.

There's just one more group that I'd like to discuss with you and that is the public broadcasters. Some do not broadcast advertisements as they are solely funded through the taxpayer and some countries levy a mandatory television licence fee, but this is not for the tv itself, it is to pay for the national broadcaster, whether you watch their stations or not.

National broadcasters are in a unique position to put programming in place that is not just "entertainment," and to produce programs that challenge us, and educate us in ways we have not considered before; but they never will. Why? Because all we want is to be entertained – to relax. We don't really want to be challenged, do we? And as a broadcaster spending taxpayers money, they have to give us what we want, and that is: Entertainment.

So why do you think we need to be constantly entertained? What is it that makes us watch television for hours on end, even when we're tired and should go to bed? What makes us finish work and slouch in the tv chair all night, apart from relaxation and entertainment?

One word: Boredom

That's right, you're bored (*tired of the world*). You've lost interest in the world, and tv helps, doesn't it? You just can't think of anything to do, but you can't just sit there alone in silence, can you? Television numbs the mind; it is like elevator muzak for the brain, and it gives just enough stimulation to keep you from thinking about your own life. It makes sure you don't spend too long with your own thoughts, it gives you an escape from reality and places you firmly in fantasy land.

That's really what entertainment is about isn't it? Escapism from reality. That's why we just leave the tv on, even if there's no interesting programs we want to watch, that's why we just leave the adverts on. The point is we just need to escape for a while, but not in quiet! That would be much too disturbing, wouldn't it?

Have you ever watched tv with the sound down? Strange, isn't it? On the one hand, you have the visual stimulation, but on the other, you're missing the audio stimulation. You see, we can't be in quiet for too long; we don't want to be alone with ourselves, so we need to fill our mind with both visual and audio stimulation to muffle our thoughts – and to some extent, it works. Until you turn it off, and then there is an eeriesilence.

So you phone someone, talk to your partner, go to the pub, go to the cinema, play a game, read, anything to stop the thoughts. Anything to stop the boredom, to stop the creeping thoughts that life is pretty pointless. “What am I doing with my life? I hate my job, I hate where I live...” When activity stops, that's where reality comes in.

But tv is different to reading a book or chatting with someone on the phone, as a means of distracting yourself from reality, isn't it? At least you are in control of your other distractions. With television, the companies push information at you, help you to form opinions, subtly convince you to buy their advertisers products, addict you to their programs, and tell *you* what is important, what *you* should be thinking about. All in the guise of information, education and entertainment.

Remember, *you* don't decide what should be shown on tv. The advertisers and the tv executives do, and polls tell them which is the most popular of the programs they choose to show you. The ones they get the most people to watch. In the end, it's about ratings. And ratings are about money. That's all. It's not about anything else.

Companies can't exist if they don't make money, pure and simple. So they will come up with any formula they can to get you to watch their programs as opposed to their competitors programs. It's not about who has the most interesting, the most intelligent and most honest and varied content to educate and inform you. It's just about how many people watch a show, and how much money they earn from advertisers.

It may be just entertainment and boredom relief for you, but to them, it's all about money

But we could all start a tv station if we wanted to! All we have to do is raise a few million pounds for the licence and broadcasting equipment, have our content approved by the government, and off we go. But what would we show? Another crime drama, more breaking news of some terrible disaster happening right now? A religious program? A sports show? A reality show? (there's an idea!) How about a home improvement show? A comedy show? A singing show? A nature program? A consumer investigation show? The choice is endless!

But what if we decided to break with tradition and use the medium of television, one of the most powerful forms of mass communication in the whole world, for something different. Something that made us remember we are human beings, something which attempted to bring us more together as a planet – programs whose content weren't dictated by advertisers, government or religious agenda. Would anyone watch it? Would you? Or are you quite content being entertained?

Will you stand up to television giants and tell them you aren't going to be dictated to anymore, that you don't want them invading your private space 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year? There's an easy way to do this you know. One which doesn't involve taking over the tv stations, protesting in the streets, or writing to your members of parliament. It's so easy, even a child can do it!

Turn off your tv

That's right, the red button on the corner of your tv. Not on the remote. Turn it off properly at the mains and unplug your aerial. And that's it! It won't be long before there's no more tv advertising, no more reality shows, no more breaking news stories every ten minutes. Could you do it, I mean really turn off your tv?

If it was sitting there could you stop yourself from turning it on, just for a minute to see if "there's anything good on." Could you? Could you do something different instead of watching tv? Something that is healthy for your system, something truly relaxing. Could you just sit for a moment in quiet, and let your brain and your body relax. With no noise?

It's difficult to begin with, but once you master it, you will enjoy it so much more than the latest home improvement show. Turning off your tv is similar to giving up smoking or alcohol. It's an addiction, and it will fight with you every day. And if you don't think you are addicted, try turning your tv off for one week. How do you feel when you see it, aren't you just a little bit tempted to switch it on and be entertained just for a little while?

No one wants you to unplug the tv! They're all screaming at you: "Noooooooo. Don't do it! You won't be able to live if you turn it off, think of what your missing, pleeeeeease, don't do it, we have families to feed, we'll lose our jobs, how will we pay the bills?" But that's not your problem, is it?

The advertisers don't want you to do it, the tv companies don't want you to do it, and the government definitely doesn't want you to do it. Why? Because they need to keep you happy, just like entertaining the troops in the war. They don't want you to have too much quiet time alone otherwise you might just start to think a little. They need you to work every day to keep the country moving, to get taxes paid so they can get on with the projects they want to do. But to keep you working, they need to make sure you are thoroughly entertained in your quiet time. "Don't complain, just keep working, there's a good chap, and why don't you relax after work with some nice entertaining tv, that'll make you feel better, all ready for work the next day."

Turning off your tv will free you from another addiction, and although I know no one is about to stop watching tv, think about it, think about what tv is stopping you doing, what tv is making you become. Where would you be without tv?

I know a television set is essential to watching dvd's or videos, but I am not discussing that, it is only the reception of television programmes we are interested in here.

You will start to have more free time, more energy, more willingness to go outside after work, even if it's cold. The tv no longer controls how you live your life. Without you watching it, the media giants will start to crumble, their power over you becomes weaker and weaker. You can always get your information from other sources.

The internet, for one, has more information, entertainment and education than you could ever imagine, and most of it's free, but one word of warning: Don't substitute one addiction for another; it's very easy to do.

What will become of television is in our hands. Do you really think you still need a service which chooses what you will see every night? I'm sure the tv companies are thinking hard too, trying to come up with new ideas to "put you in control," but it's still their choice of programmes.

You don't need that now. You are free from their addiction, the moment you unplug the aerial. Try it.

[Back to Index](#)

Tenderness

1. *A tendency to express warm and affectionate feeling*
2. *A positive feeling of liking*
3. *Warm compassionate feelings*
4. *A feeling of concern for the welfare of someone (especially someone defenceless)*

Most of us think of tenderness as the way we are with a partner we are in love with. We caress them gently, we touch them softly, we pay attention to their body and their mind. We envelop them with love. We would not let anything bad happen to them. We feel a warmth inside our stomachs and in our hearts when we are near them. But then the moment is over and it's back to normal life. Especially for men, who aren't well known for their ability to be tender at the best of times!

What I want to discuss with you here is taking the feelings of the tender moment, and applying it to your life, not just to your loved one.

So what is it to be tender? What are the key characteristics of one who is tender? Someone who is gentle, caring, concerned, or kind perhaps? Someone who is compassionate? What I want to understand is how we can enter into such feelings with the one we love but then switch off as soon as we leave that person, and become angry, spiteful, hateful, jealous and cruel.

For me, tenderness is something we carry with us through our life, and every being we come into contact with, we act with tenderness. When I told a good friend of mine I was going to be writing about tenderness today, she expressed surprise.

“Why are you surprised?” I asked.

“Because men really don't know the first thing about being tender.”

On reflection I had to agree with her.

Men are the strongest of the human species, the most violent, the most dominating. They act in ways which are opposite to what women would consider as tender! They can be aggressive, ambitious, pack animals who think being tender is a sign of weakness (*the property of lacking physical or mental strength; liability to failure under pressure or stress or strain*). But I'm here to give men the benefit of the doubt! After all, I'm a man too, and I don't consider myself weak because I am tender.

Let's just put all this down to good old history. Let's just say it was an evolutionary plus point for men to be violent and aggressive, after all, the human brain was only in its infancy, and we had to fend off predators and other males who had designs on our women folk. We had more muscle than the women, whose task it was to give birth to and rear offspring, so we took up the task of protecting our family, and were prepared to use whatever force necessary to do it.

But let's put that all behind us, that was oh, so very long ago, and man is a different creature now, right? Our minds have evolved since that time. We no longer have to fend off blood thirsty predators, and although other men may have designs on our women, we can now use complex language to explain that they are in fact with us at this moment in time, and so won't be going off anywhere! So there's really no excuse for men not to “let their guard down” and let themselves develop the tenderness that women have had for millennia.

To me, It seems that evolution may be lagging behind our brains and has left us men with a modern scientific brain, and the emotional system of our cavemen ancestors. Still, let us not be daunted by a slight failing in evolution. We are the most intelligent species on the planet, and as men, we can easily learn something new – right lads? So now we know where we are in our emotional development, we can move forward.

Let's get one thing clear between us; this is not about letting your guard down at all, nor is it about being more like women. This is about all of us approaching life more delicately. The word delicate might appeal to men because its dictionary definition is “*marked by great skill especially in meticulous technique*.” So let's look at this as a challenge to develop a meticulous technique shall we ? Ladies feel free to join in on this discussion.

For most of us, we just bash through life, swatting and swiping at whatever gets in our way. We mow people down caring nothing for their feelings. We trample all over the world leaving our indelible footprint wherever we go, leaving chaos and mayhem in our wake, all for what? A bit of success, a bit of cash, a big house?

Will it all be worth it in the few short years you have left on this planet? I say short, because even if you are only eighteen, you will only live to about eighty if you're lucky. And on an earth that has been in existence for approaching four billion years, sixty odd years is not even the smallest drop in the widest ocean. So let's start from the beginning, shall we?

Tenderness is a skill we must develop by paying close attention to ourselves. One good way to start the process off, is to *slow down*. Not a little. A lot.

Take a leaf out of the book of walking meditation, and take each step thoughtfully. Slowly. Taking great care not to crush anything in your path. Try it for a moment now if you wish, just for a minute or two.

Take small, slow steps, almost examining every crack on the floor, or speck of dust on the carpet. One step after another, watching your feet. It may seem like a silly exercise, but you will start to notice more of a connection between your mind, your body and the earth you walk on. You just aren't going to get that kind of feeling when you're moving at the speed of sound.

Developing tenderness requires patience, and patience (*good-natured tolerance of delay or incompetence*) takes time to develop as well. First you have to slow down. Slow down in your speech. Slow down in your work. Slow down in your thinking. Slow down in your actions. If you don't, you will never learn this technique (you wouldn't learn woodworking or car mechanics if you were doing everything so fast either).

Tenderness is something that makes a man stronger. It shows that although he has great power in his body, that he has mastered himself, and uses the power he has to hold his partner, his child and the whole world in his arms. When a man is unsympathetic, tough, and violent all he has shown is that he has not mastered his own emotions. He is still at the beck and call of an emotional system that developed millions of years ago.

Real power is in picking the most delicate of flowers with the strongest of hands, all the while taking great care to preserve it intact. Real power is in knowing you have the strength to beat someone to a pulp, but instead extending him the hand of friendship. Real power is in knowing you have it, but will never use it. Women have respect for men who have mastered their power, and are tender. No woman truly respects a man that is violent, because she knows that one day he may turn on her and her child.

So as we continue along this road to tenderness let us stop for a moment and think. Is tenderness an action, or is it a part of who I am?

I like to think that tenderness is something I carry with me at all times, something that affects what I do and the way I do it. I approach working with tenderness. I choose the job I do to be tender to the planet. I speak with tenderness, to convey my point in a way that shows I am aware of myself, and I am aware of the impact my speaking may have on other people. I carry it with me in my feet that touch the delicately balanced planet, in my hands that could so easily destroy, in my mind that could so easily create violence, and in my heart that could so easily be cold.

So many people think that this kind of love – which is what it is – is only for women; that men have *real* work to do, like building skyscrapers, chopping down forests, creating wealth, and providing for the family. They don't have time for this soppy stuff! But men love tenderness. They loved it from their mothers, and they love it from their partners. Men have the ultimate responsibility now to learn this vital skill. A skill which may save us from future wars and conflicts, stop dominance of one over another, and save the planet from being destroyed by men who run businesses that trample all over our precious resources at the speed of sound. It is vital we all learn this. I cannot stress this enough.

When a man has mastered himself, and is concerned for the welfare of others, above his own personal wants and desires, then the world will truly be a special place to be.

Imagine a world where men approached each task delicately. Imagine, you, as a man, being able to be tender with everything in this world, not just your closest loved one. Take this tenderness with you, everywhere you go, feel its power in your fingertips, and in your mind. You are on the road to self-mastery. But first, you have to slow down.

[Back to Index](#)

Thought

1. *The content of cognition; the main thing you are thinking about*
2. *The process of using your mind to consider something carefully*
3. *The organised beliefs of a period or group or individual*
4. *A personal belief or judgement that is not founded on proof or certainty*

Have you ever travelled by tram, bus, or train? Have you ever looked at all the people around you, and wondered what they might be thinking? I have, and it's amazing to watch! You can tell they're thinking as they blankly stare out the window, or into space, but you don't know what they're thinking!

Everybody's thinking about something different. One man is thinking: "I wonder what I'll get my wife for her birthday tomorrow," whilst the other is thinking: "I'll grab his wallet as he goes to get off." One woman thinks: "I need a cigarette right now," whilst another thinks of her dying mother in the hospital. One boy thinks: "that girl's quite cute." One girl thinks: " why doesn't that horrible boy stop staring at me?" All in all, that's a lot of thinking going on in one tram, and we can't see any of it.

Imagine if you could see thought! What an interesting place the world would be. Embarrassing for some, dangerous for others, or just plain comical. You see, you never really know what people are thinking. You can try to judge facial expressions and actions but you never really know...

The politician talking on camera, discussing morality, whilst thinking about meeting his mistress.

The schoolteacher chastising a child for smoking, and secretly wondering if he'll ever be able to kick his own smoking habit.

The soldier who has killed an enemy, thinks of his family, and how he would feel if one of them had been killed.

The film star smiles broadly for the fans whilst wishing he was at home in bed.

The world is full of thought, which is silent, but if one acts on a thought, that thought becomes a reality. You can think of declaring war, raping a girl, murdering that old man, kissing that girl, telling someone you like them, telling someone you hate them. You can think of quitting your job, leaving your husband, having one more child, or having sex with a prostitute. You can think of stabbing that man, fighting the football fan, telling your parents you love them, robbing the bank, or killing your friend and stealing his money.

But it's all right, there's no good and bad thought, just thought. No one can see it, it's just in your brain, in an area specifically reserved for putting everything together. A thought is innocuous. It cannot directly harm another being in the entire world, until we turn that thought into action.

I stabbed that man. I raped that girl. I hate you. I declare war on you. I have quit my job.

Before every action there is thought. When someone says, "I'm sorry, I wasn't thinking," what they mean is that they are sorry they weren't thinking straight. Action cannot take place without thinking even if you didn't mean it. There is always thought present.

Try to ask for a kilo of bananas turn left in the street, light a cigarette or make a phone call without thinking first. It's not possible. You must have already thought (*the process of using your mind to consider something carefully*).

Meditators spend their time trying to transcend thought, to quieten the mind from its incessant mind talk, to achieve a state where thought does not exist, only pure consciousness and clarity. They attempt to do this through various means – by chanting mantras for instance – to force out all other noise, but we will discuss meditation in more detail as a separate topic. Let us just say that thought has been giving anyone concerned with the mind a great deal of problems over many years!

We already know that thought is a process, but what we are probably not aware of is that thought can only use what already exists in the mind to work with. This will make sense to all of you, as you would not be able to work out a complex mathematical problem if you had never studied mathematics, nor be able to speak in french, if you had never bothered to learn the language.

Thought relies on what has been learned already. In short, memory. This can only mean one thing: that everything you think, is based on events from the past. Education, experience, teachers, parents, politicians, media, your peers. In fact, every person, and everything, you have come into contact with, is going into your

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

memory, ready to be pulled out if needs be, to construct complex thought.

You couldn't live without memory, otherwise you would never remember how to drive your car, do your job, or even remember where you live. That would lead to a lot of confusion in the world. So memory is vitally important to the smooth running of humanity. The problems begin when thought comes from the conditioned (*a learning process in which an organism's behaviour becomes dependent on the occurrence of a stimulus in its environment*) mind.

We all have conditioned minds to some extent. Do you remember when we had our first discussion about why you thought the way you do? Remember the following example, where we tried to understand where our views came from, and how we could transcend them. How over generations, our opinions were being formed by the attitudes of our teachers, parents, media, politicians, culture and friends?

I support the death penalty
I am opposed to the death penalty

Where the conditioning of our minds made us not able to think openly, even if we wanted to. Where we looked at the above statements and chose our side instantaneously, without “thinking.” Well, thought was there, it just happened very quickly! So let’s look into this very carefully, shall we? If I can make a snap decision like that, based on thought alone, thought must be the single most powerful weapon in the world. Imagine that! Your mind as a weapon.

They say that countries don't start wars, people do, but I'd like to take that one step further, and say that people don't start wars, thought does. Remember, before every action there is a thought. Do you see how dangerous this can be?

If I have been thinking about a certain race of people, and based on my conditioned mind, think that they are a dirty, evil race who have come here to take over my country, I could use this thinking to condition and convert others into starting a war against them. Just like that.

Although some of you will say that thought can be used for good, let me say that true love, the love of all other living creatures, could never come from thought. You never think you love someone, you love them with your whole being. You feel love. When you care for another human being who is sick or dying, you do it out of love, not because of thought. When you see suffering, you help out of love; out of empathy with another being who is suffering. You do not need to “think” about it.

I love you dad

You didn't need to think about that, did you? Thought causes suffering and pain, thought causes jealousy, greed, war, ambition, power, desire and violence. Love is all that thought is not. Love is a feeling of peace between all men. Love is harmony, where thought is destruction. Thought is where “I” get in the way of love, with all my wants, needs, desires and prejudices. All acted out as a result of thinking. When all these are gone, there is only love. But let’s look at thought in history shall we?

Can anyone really tell me that anything good has come about from thinking? Governments starting wars, religions going to war, kings going to war, all for what? Honour, or for a noble cause? I'm afraid that maybe the conquest of land, the conversion of people to a different religion, the greed of men, the arrogance of kings, and the desire to rule the world, are more like it! And all this pain and suffering, caused to millions, over thousands of years, has been the result of someone somewhere thinking... “I'm going to take over France,” or “I think we should kill the unbelievers,” or “there's gold here, it's mine,” or “look at all the oil, I want it for myself.”

No, thinking should be relegated to the history books, it hasn't really done us any good.

What then is to be done about thought? We can't just turn it off, we can't just flick a switch and replace thought with love, and see all the problems of the world clearly. We can't force our brains to stop thinking, or take a pill and see reality without the smokescreen of thought. No. The only way forward is to be aware of yourself, aware of yourself in the moment, where thought is occurring, and step aside.

What do I mean by step aside?

Well, to put it simply, we get in the way of clarity, with prejudice, ideas, opinions, education; what we have heard our politicians say, our friends, or the media say. We have put up so many barriers, that clear awareness of the problem is not possible. Conditioning has closed our minds to all but the past. The only way forward is to decondition our minds, to remove the layers of conditioning and see what is really there, not to limit ourselves by thought anymore.

We are the most intelligent beings on the planet, but when we look at what we are doing because of thought, I sincerely believe we should give up that title. So next time you are riding the tram, bus or train, have a look around you. I mean, have a *good* look around you, and look at each and every one of your fellow passengers.

Try to see what your mind is doing when you focus on the man with the shabby clothes. Listen to the voice within, which is you, the judge. Listen to what you're saying about the man. Listen to the terrible things you think about him. And at that point, try to step outside yourself. Try to visualise sitting on your shoulder as a virtual observer, and the physical you becomes the observed. This is a very important exercise in developing self awareness, but don't try to think "why am I thinking this way?" That is only you getting in the way of yourself again, just watch.

The homeless man, the woman who is not so beautiful, the schoolchildren fighting. The man who smells of alcohol, the man with the tracksuit who looks like he might rob you, the old lady staring at you. The group of youths laughing at the other end of the tram, the business man in his sharp suit, the man with the bitten dirty nails. The woman with shabby hair, the man whose coat is torn, the blind man with the stick. Thinking, thinking, thinking, that's all we ever do. We can't help it, we have to think, think, think...

"Urgh, look at that homeless beggar, urgh, I bet he stinks of urine, I hope he doesn't come near me, or touch me, he's disgusting."

"That woman should really do something with herself, she's really ugly. Maybe if she got better clothes, wore a bit of make up, she might look better..."

"I wish those schoolchildren would stop that, it's really annoying. Why do they let schoolkids on the trams at this time, it's really inconvenient. They don't even pay, and they're really loud..."

"That guy looks like a criminal, his eyes, the way he's dressed, he doesn't look like he's got a job. I better check my wallet, and make sure I've got my hand on it just in case..."

"Those youths are really noisy. I bet they're aggressive. I wish I could tell them to keep quiet, but they'd probably attack me, yeah they look like that sort of people..."

"That man looks like he's got a lot of money. I wish I had a lot of money. Maybe he hasn't, maybe he just dresses like that to impress people. I bet he hasn't got any money, that's why he travels by tram, otherwise he'd go by car..."

"Urgh, that man's nails are disgusting, they're filthy, why doesn't he clean them? I wonder what sort of job he does, he doesn't look clean. I bet he doesn't wash very often."

"Why doesn't that woman do something with her hair? It looks awful, she should look after herself more"

"Look at that man's coat. I wouldn't go out wearing a coat like that, why doesn't he get it fixed? Maybe he can't afford a new one. Who can't afford a new coat? I'd be embarrassed wearing that coat..."

"Look at that blind guy, it must be awful not being able to see anything. I bet he wishes he could see, he's missing out on so much. I wonder how he lost his sight, maybe it was an accident. How does he know when to get off..."

We judge and we criticise, and the great thing is, we don't even know the first thing about these people! With the way we think, it's a good job thoughts are not visible, otherwise we'd hurt a lot of people's feelings!

How would you feel, if you knew you were being judged and criticised all the time; not verbally, but psychologically? Not by someone who loves you, but by a complete stranger, who you will see for a fleeting moment once in your life. And from that meeting, without actually acknowledging each other, you will use all of your conditioning (from parents opinions to teachers; from media opinions to politicians; from experience to peer group opinion) to make instant judgements about them. A person you will never know, who has had no effect on you, becomes an object. An object for judgement. Why?

Well, in evolutionary terms, watching other people could have meant life or death in some situations. You had to decide very quickly if this person was friend or foe. It was all about survival in the old days, and to some extent, we still need our early warning systems in case of attack. But this is not about survival, is it?

Imagine the previous tram car scenario. Who do you think the only person not judging, or not criticizing was? Was it the homeless beggar, because he was at the bottom, addicted to alcohol, with no where to live? Or was it the ugly woman, because she couldn't very well criticise other people with a face like hers? Or was it the youths, because they *obviously* don't think a lot?

Wrong on all counts! The homeless beggar is judging you for not giving him any money, the ugly woman is looking at another woman and criticizing her clothes, the youths are judging the oldies because they aren't cool enough. The only person not actively judging and criticizing is the man with no sight, not because he has no prejudice or conditioning, but because (although conditioning will in the most part be through language) the object of the conditioning must be visual.

There is no point in being told that criminals have a certain look, dress a certain way, or behave in a certain manner if you can't see them to apply this rule you have been told. Without the visual cues, the conditioning is incomplete and worthless. You are conditioned by society (criminals dress/look/behave a certain way), you have a visual cue (someone who fits this conditioning), you process this against your conditioning (does the visual cue match the conditioning?), and come up with a thought...

"This man must be a criminal, I should watch out."

Amazing! The brain is amazing! You see, it doesn't matter now if he is a gentle family man on the way to meet his wife for shopping, or a hardened criminal, ready to stick a knife in you for your last ten pounds. He matches the profile you have in your database, so the judgement has already been made for you. No amount of convincing would allow you to accept he wasn't a criminal.

"No, my mind's made up, there's definitely something funny about him..."

And so it goes on, the constant judging and criticizing of our fellow man, through conditioning of the brain, and thought, its messenger.

As the most intelligent species on earth, don't you think we started to lay thought to rest for a while? Is our thinking really helping us improve the world or just helping to judge it and criticise it a little more, and feel oh so smug, when we're proved right.

"See, I told you he was a criminal."

*Thought can only lead to violence.
When thought is absent love is present.*

Can you see that? Only if we love the criminals, the ugly women, the homeless beggar, and the man with the dirty nails, can thought cease. Most of you will be saying: "This is extremely difficult, how am I to put aside years of prejudice and conditioning to experience love? And what if I am right about them?" (there goes your thinking again.)

Love is not effort. You cannot force yourself to love another human being. You cannot decide to love. Love is all encompassing, love is a feeling that warms your whole body. Love is just being. And if some of you are confused now, let me ask you a simple question. When you say:

"I love you dad"

what are you thinking? Are you judging him, because he is old, or for the things he has done in his life, right or wrong?

If your dad was a criminal, could you still say "I love you?" What if your dad was a homeless beggar could you say "I love you?" If he was stupid, smart, wise or ignorant, could you still say "I love you?" When you truly love you cannot judge. Now go back to the last moment you told your parents or someone very close to you "I love you," and remember how it felt.

What were you thinking when you said it?

When you love, the conditioning crumbles, you start to see reality as it really is. You stop judging, and criticizing, after all, where does it get you? It only makes you feel worse thinking negative thoughts – about yourself, or anyone else.

Negative thinking is responsible for causing wars. For if it was positive thinking, that would be love, not thought, and when you love something, or someone, you certainly don't want to destroy it! When a leader of a country thinks negatively about another nation of people, it won't be long before you are all

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

thinking negatively, and, thanks to conditioning (propaganda/education/media), you will suddenly hate and want to destroy an entire nation of people! Amazing. And most of you will never have met someone from the hated country, and will know nothing about them, but are still prepared to go to war and kill them.

So in order to hate you have to think. Remember this.

I am not asking you to walk around preaching peace and love to the world, just try one thing when you are next in a restaurant, at work, on the tram, at school, or in the pub when you see someone you want to judge or to criticise. Stop!

Close your eyes for the briefest of moments, and imagine that someone somewhere told them “I love you.” They are someone's son, daughter, husband, wife, girlfriend, boyfriend, best friend. Someone loves them very much, someone who told them “I love you” with no judgement or criticism, the same way you said to your parents or someone close to you, “I love you.”

Why are you judging them, why do you criticise them in your mind? They are loved, as you are loved, why waste precious energy turning love into thought and negativity, when love is already present?

[Back to Index](#)

Time

1. *An indefinite period (usually marked by specific attributes or activities)*
2. *The continuum of experience in which events pass from the future through the present to the past*
3. *The time as given by a clock*

As we begin, what is to be, the final topic of this book, I complete a process that started in 2002, and involved almost four years of writing notes and making observations. A long time in my life, but in the life span of the universe, insignificant.

Scientists have speculated that the universe was created in a big bang many billions of years ago, that out of nothing, came something, but I can't buy into that.

Everything is, was, and always will be; out of nothing, comes nothing. Sure, this universe may have started expanding again billions of years ago, but that could be the result of a massive contraction from a previous universe. The word uni means "*one, single*" but why should there only be one universe? Perhaps it is all our minds are ready to perceive at the moment, and as we cannot "see" another we all agree that this is the only universe, but we all know how reliable our eyes are! But that is just our minds telling us that if we can't see something it cannot exist. If you have ever tried to push two magnets together and felt them repel or attract each other you will know that just because the eyes can't see something, and the mind can't perceive, it doesn't mean it isn't there!

Perhaps there are a billion universes just like this one; perhaps this is the largest; perhaps this is the smallest. There are many "perhaps" but we shouldn't discount anything. We have many intelligent scientists all using their big brains to tell us what happened, when, and why, but they can only go on what has already been discovered and build on that.

"Perhaps" we should throw away our science books and just let the insight come to us, but that doesn't mean we should just sit back and sleep whilst life passes us by, not that the universe cares though.

Several days ago I was outside looking at the stars. The temperature read minus twenty two degrees celsius, and I suddenly realised I was getting incredibly cold. I started to think what would happen to me if I stayed out all night and surmised that I would probably expire from the cold but as I looked up at the stars and the trees and the snow on the ground. I realised that only my girlfriend, friends and family would care. The stars would still twinkle in the night, the snow would still be on the ground and the trees would still sway gently in the breeze. It was only Man who "cares," and who attaches meaning to everything – the universe just is. It is in order. It always will be. Even when the sun and the earth are gone, the universe will be in order.

For some reason we seem to think that the earth is the centre of the universe, that everything "revolves" around us, our needs, our desires, our sadness, our happiness, but none of that matters to the universe. It is not that it is cold and uncompassionate, these are man-made words to describe Man, do you see? The language of the universe is indecipherable to us, but still we try to explain it in Man's language, which is limited

How we cling to this life though. How we long to make it last forever. How we desire to see just one more day on the planet. To do what? To hate, to destroy, to desire, to conquer?

"Just one more day so I can see the sun rise," we ask some indeterminate supernatural being. "We want to live, we want to feel the blood through our veins, we don't want to die." But if you watch a snowflake melt in your hand, is the snowflake really dying?

Give me some time

We all want a little more time, don't we? We all want more hours in the day. For what? To work so we can pay our electric bills, or go on holiday, or buy a new computer? What would the universe think of all this? Insignificant?

Well, it should be clear to you by now that everything we have ambition for, everything we desire, is insignificant universally. Even the good work you do trying to save the rainforest is insignificant in the universe. Remember in four billion years or so, they predict that the sun will expand, taking us and most of the solar system with it. We shall be no more.

But that shouldn't concern us; you and I will only be alive for maximum of 100 years more (probably a lot less), so instead of dedicating ourselves to work, and causing suffering for everyone else, shouldn't we be looking inward towards the universe, and trying to understand ourselves? Because we are the universe.

We are part of the whole. No birth, no death, just change. But still we are frightened of death, which is

more natural than any other process. No beginning, no end, just change. Do you see? And yet we stand at funerals giving eulogies, and weeping, asking ourselves how we can carry on living without our loved ones; and the stars still twinkle, and the trees blow gently in the wind... Are you starting to understand? I hope so.

Time is a man-made process, although the movement of the stars, the rising of the sun and the change in seasons is a natural one. Yes, days end and night comes, but then day comes. If we are to truly understand what is going on, we will have to stop creating division between everything including day, night, today, yesterday, tomorrow. Do you see? They have no significance.

You will argue that time is evident in Man, especially where you can see the ageing process taking place, but does that mean that all time is going from birth towards death? Surely that is a man-made concept?

Last week I tried an experiment. I changed my computer clock to some random time and some random date (I couldn't figure out how to turn it off!) I took down clocks, didn't read the paper, and didn't watch tv; instead, I immersed myself in my writing, and before long I didn't know what day it was or what time it was except by looking out the window and seeing it was getting dark.

For the first few days I suffered a lot of pain. I needed to know the time. I needed to know what day it was. What date it was. It just seemed like a part of me was missing. Like I was missing out on life by not knowing where the week began and the week ended. But after five days I began to relax. I wasn't missing out on anything, that was just my mind playing tricks on me. And when I looked up at the stars that night, I realised I hadn't missed a thing.

So why do we place so much importance on time? Is it that we think we don't have a lot so we have to do, and acquire as much as we can in the limited time available? What if no one told you how long a human life was? What if no one forced you to learn everything you could between one and eighteen? What if a time limit wasn't placed on the amount of time you worked? What if there were no weekends to look forward to? What if no one told you to retire at 65? Do you see? With every step of the human life, we attach time to it. We break it down into blocks and analyse it

“Right alan, you will go to junior school from 5 until 12, then you will go to senior school from 12 until 18, then you will go to university from 18 until 21, after which, you will work for 44 years exactly, until you retire at 65, and then you can do what you like from 65 until you die. Oh, and make sure to plan time to have a family, that's very important too!” It's too much, isn't it?

Why do we keep the human controlled like this?

Well there is one reason, and that is so those in power can get the maximum out of us while we are alive. Why else would they be so insistent that we went to school at 5 (or earlier) and learned as much as we could until 21? Why wouldn't they just let us be? It's simple, because we are born to serve. We are born to serve those in powerful positions, and help them become richer. No other reason.

But the human is so much more than that. He is not a servant of the rich, he is the most intelligent species in the world characterized by superior intelligence, articulate speech, and erect carriage (remember?). He has a mind so large he can explore the entire universe with it and beyond. He is part of the whole. He is not someone to be pushed around into little time slots, even the birds and the fish (with their distinctly inferior intelligence) don't get controlled like that, and they're just birds and fish!

Breaking free of time

How hard would it be to get rid of all of your clocks and your calendars? Impossible?

“Must dash, got a train/bus/tube/plane to catch.”

“Oh no, I'm late, my boss will kill me!”

But we must free ourselves from the bondage of the time piece. A great invention, I grant you, which helps keep our economy “ticking over” quite nicely thank you, but unfortunately, it is something we run our entire life to. Does the universe care if we are late for a meeting, or are late for drinks with friends? No it just carries on in order.

Time, as we see it, is unnatural; it is not universal time, but time invented to control Man. Whatever the physicists say about time, we will never understand it until we let go of our attachment to human time. Remember what we said about science? They could be wrong! Oh, and in fact, have been many, many times.

We want to know if it is possible to go back in time, or go forward in time, and the scientists do their

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

calculations, some saying it is possible, some saying it isn't, but isn't all this talk of time travel just wanting to get to any time instead of *now*? Instead of being present in this moment, which is *now*?

You may go away thinking: "He didn't answer any of the questions I wanted to know about time," but time is indescribable in human words (whether by means of verbal language or mathematical models). We don't understand it, and we will never be able to, unless we surrender ourselves to the moment. The point where time is neither moving backwards or forwards. And anyway, what is backwards, and what is forwards? And while we're at it, which way is up in the universe, and which way is right, and which way is left? We will have to explore it with our own minds. That is all I can say.

[Back to Index](#)

Tolerance

1. *A disposition to allow freedom of choice and behaviour*
2. *The act of tolerating something*
3. *Willingness to recognize and respect the beliefs or practices of others*

I have never liked the word tolerance. It always implies that somehow we disapprove of somebody's ethnic background or religion, but we put up with it, usually under duress. It is almost like saying, "I hate what you believe in, but I have to put up with it, the government told me to," when really you would like nothing more than to see the back of them.

Bloody immigrants, get rid of the lot of them

You hear it down the pub, at work, round at friends houses, all over the western world at least. Sometimes people's views are more extreme, as has happened in Britain, where political parties have been set up, whose manifestos are to get anyone who isn't white, repatriated to their "home" country, even if they were born in the UK.

Some people hate that there are people walking round with different coloured skin or different clothing, and especially if they believe in a different religion to us. There are always news items where someone has been murdered because of their skin colour, but fortunately, it does not happen too often.

We, the expansionist western countries, like the UK, France, and Spain, travelled the world, violently colonising countries in Africa, the Caribbean, South America, and Asia, amongst many others, including Ireland.

After the second world war, Britain needed cheap labour to help rebuild the country and the economy. They didn't want the immigrants mixing too much so they set up "areas" for them to live.

They were disliked by those in power, but "tolerated," because they worked long and hard for very little money. These immigrants suffered taunts and violence at the hands of unintelligent "locals" whose only skill was being white and British. The Irish, who were under the control of England for several hundred years were often abused, and suffered violence at the hands of the British jobs when they were only there to earn some money to send home – and were welcomed by the British government, I might add "

The powerful will always tolerate people, but only as long as it benefits them

So in came the immigrants with their strange languages, strange food, and strange customs from India, Pakistan, and Jamaica, amongst other countries, expecting to be welcomed by the British, but they were just tolerated. The people in power didn't like having the immigrants running around out of their control, which didn't happen in the old days, in the colonies. They were here, working and living as free men and women, and it wasn't long before they started having children, who became British citizens.

The racists in charge of Britain must have been seething that these people were free British subjects to be afforded the protection of Her Majesty. Indians, Pakistanis, West Indians. What was going to happen to our culture?

The West Indians are often blamed for bringing in drugs and starting street crime in Britain but what was happening to their culture, and more rightly, their self-esteem by moving here? Tolerated by the government, only because they provided cheap labour, and despised by the people for their black skin. What must that do to a person – a human being? It is no wonder we have trouble with "ethnic minorities" in countries.

Who dares judge a man for the colour of his skin? We all came from Africa (according to the scientists), and what colour do you think our skin was there? White? Skin colour is just a biological adaptation to the environment, nothing more. We must all remember that when we are being "tolerant."

Tolerance has nothing to do with compassion. Tolerance places you above the person you are being tolerant to, do you understand? It places you as a powerful superior, and it is only by your good grace you allow them to exist at all!

In my mind, we have to take this word out of the dictionary if we are to progress as a species. We must accept all who we meet as brothers, for they are. We are forged from the same steel. We are one with them, what does it matter if they speak a different language, believe in different gods, eat different foods, and have different skin colours? We are all part of the whole, the indivisible. There is nothing else. You will see this

when you gain more insight.

So instead of “tolerating” people, we must embrace them (not physically, although you can if you like!).

We must accept them as homo sapiens, members of our own species, and give up the insularity of nations. Nations are just political borders created by powerful men with weapons at their disposal. They mean nothing. An immigrant is not an immigrant, he or she is just another human being, just like you and me.

Admittedly, some immigrants are just after a quick buck, and do nothing to contribute to the community, but merely take, but they are giving their labour and that is all that is asked of them. Some immigrants bring crime and violence with them, but how can we expect anything else from humans? They bring themselves, and if they are violent, they will bring violence, do you see? If they are compassionate and loving, they will bring that.

Unfortunately, we cannot always see deeply into a man's mind, and I agree that there is no point in allowing people to immigrate if they are intent on causing misery to the people who have given them at home, that is clear. They can carry on doing that in their own country, but we must not expect people to conform to our way of life. We have to understand that to them, our culture is alien.

I found this out myself when I emigrated to australia to live with my australian wife. I just couldn't understand why people drove so slowly, and why they didn't let you out at junctions. I couldn't understand why they were so loud, or so obsessed with sport. I came from a country which had sent the ancestors of some australian to colonise the country, so you would have thought that it would be easy for me, but it wasn't. They weren't tolerant at all, they expected me to conform, or “bugger off back to england,” which is ultimately what I did.

So imagine coming from a culture with a different language, followed by the fact that people are looking at you because of the way you dress, not to mention your skin colour, and you can see why people who emigrate to find a better life, (which is what our ancestors did when they left africa) are frightened when the country of their dreams turns out to be not so rosy. When the people shout hurtful names at them in the street, and their children are bullied at school, or beaten up just because they come from another part of the earth.

We are all immigrants.

So remember, next time you think of being tolerant towards someone, don't bother, offer the silent hand of compassion. There is nothing to be tolerant of. Maybe if you get to know someone “different” from yourself, you will start to see the similarities.

[Back to Index](#)

Torture

1. *Extreme mental distress*
2. *Unbearable physical pain*
3. *Intense feelings of suffering; acute mental or physical pain*
4. *The deliberate, systematic, or wanton infliction of physical or mental suffering by one or more persons in an attempt to force another person to yield information or to make a confession or for any other reason*

How can you!
How can I?
How can I do it?
How could I even consider it?
It's my job.
He deserves it.
He knows something.

As the most intelligent species on the planet it stands to reason that we could come up with something so cruel. No other species has been able to think up this one, so I guess that makes us kind of unique. And what an honour, to be unique in, not only killing a fellow member of our species, but making him suffer with unbearable physical, or mental pain first. Truly a remarkable achievement.

For what?

Governments are well known specialists, the military too, it's part of the training you know! Organised crime gangs are notorious users of torture as well. After all, it normally gets you what you want. And what you want is *information*. They want to know when the attack will take place, where the money is, who you told, who else is involved, where the guns are, what your mission is, or why you betrayed us.

Do you notice they aren't torturing someone to find out anything nice? That would be absurd, wouldn't it? "Where's the restaurant?" "What time does the next bus come?" "What is on at the cinema tonight?" "Are the shops still open?" "Tell us now or we'll kill you!"

No. Torture is reserved for people who "breach national security," "are involved with terrorism," "are agents of enemy states," "have passed information to the enemy," or perhaps "are planning an attack." For organised crime it is likely to be "anyone who is against them, or who does something to upset them." So on that basis we'll leave them out of this discussion for now.

So as we can see, torture is an instrument of war "*the waging of armed conflict against an enemy*." Well that all seems pretty clear.

In war, your mission is to overcome the enemy by any means necessary, so I guess all things considered to be torture, are as excusable as bullets, missiles, anti-personnel mines, rocket propelled grenades, cluster bombs, or basically anything that can explode and kill human beings. Yes, I think torture sits quite nicely with all the other instruments of war, and is perhaps in a way kinder, as killing is not the main objective – whereas you couldn't really say that about a cluster bomb could you?

And while we're at it, the person who is being tortured only has themselves to blame for the pain and the agony, because if they told their torturers what they wanted to know it would all be over quickly. The problem is that the people being tortured have also been trained not to say anything, so that makes the whole sorry situation all drawn out.

Torture is such a wide and varied craft. From simple things, like not letting the person sleep for a week, to more varied methods, such as removing a finger, holding their head under water, or using electrodes on genitals. It's so hard to keep track of new developments.

There is only so much pain that the body can take before blacking out, and the torturers take extra care to keep the pain level under that threshold, so you stay conscious throughout the whole process. They may eventually kill you, even if you give them the information, so most people hold out for as long as they can. Of course, torturers aren't bad people, so they'll let you have some water, maybe a bite to eat if your lucky, talk nicely to you, just so they can torture you some more. After all, a dead body isn't any good to them, well at least not until they've got the information they wanted!

Had enough yet?

I have. How can one human being inflict this amount of suffering on another human being. Are they such monsters, these torturers? Do they have sadistic tendencies (*sexual pleasure obtained by inflicting harm (physical or psychological) on others*)? That maybe so, but I don't think that's it. Do they have no empathy (*understanding and entering into another's feelings*) with the rest of the human race? Perhaps. But even if you have never tortured anyone – and I hope you haven't – I would like you to consider this.

Imagine you are a torturer. You torture people to get nationally important information from them. The only people you torture are "bad people," set on destroying your way of life. Now, imagine that the person with electrodes on their testicles was your father, and imagine the girl being half drowned while gasping for air was your daughter. Someone you love is being subjected to unbearable mental or physical pain, what

would you feel? What would you do?

They have, through conditioning, become involved with plots to blow up buildings and people, they have lost sight of love and are only thinking negatively. Do you still love them? Could you bear to see them suffer? Could you torture them yourself, even if it was your job? This is a very important question because the people being tortured are someone's son or someone's father. Somebody loves them the same way you love your family and couldn't bear to see them suffer either.

I hear you saying: "What if this man was about to detonate a nuclear weapon and kill millions of people, wouldn't it be justified then?"

Let me just say that someone always has justification for something in the world, and we are trying to reach a point together, where this scenario will not exist. When there is clarity of mind, there will be no one trying to kill millions of people for an idea, a thought. Negative thought is a sickness of the mind, and we should feel compassion for these people, and try to guide them back to love. Fighting hate with hate will only produce more hate.

Let's come back to the torturers. What we are trying to understand together is the ability of a human being, whom we believe can feel empathy when seeing another human being suffer, to willingly inflict unbearable pain and suffering on another. We do not know if they actively enjoy it, but we have to assume that through unclear thinking, this is a distinct possibility, as we know that some people with psychopathic tendencies – who enjoy the power over another – have the ability to do this without any remorse.

Do you agree? Or could a soldier, government agent, or someone who has been conditioned to believe that whatever he is doing has "right on his side" (in the interest of the nation), make another human suffer in this way? No job is that important. What would your wife, girlfriend or mother think about your job? Would they be "so proud" that their partner/son tortures people? Would you be happy to tell everybody in your local community what you do? Would you tell your children, "it was all in a good cause." Remember the old saying: "The ends never justifies the means." Otherwise where will it end?

Will the supermarket bosses start torturing their rivals to find out where their cheap source of bananas came from? Will a husband have his wife tortured to find out if she slept with another man while he was away?

You may think I am being ridiculous here, but if you think about it, if you really want to know something, how far are you prepared to go to get that information? If you believed the information was really vital to you, would you do anything to get it? Well, that's what governments do. They believe that the information they require is vital to national security, to the nation – their nation, not yours. After all, they don't consult you if they wish to declare war, torture people or execute them; it's not your business, it's state business, remember that.

In order to preserve peace, it was necessary to torture these 3,000 people to get the information about the weapons and stop them from launching an attack. It was unavoidable.

Surely not the words of a human being, the most intelligent species on the planet? One whose intellect and use of speech is superior to anything else on this planet (and maybe the galaxy). We really cannot say that we are an advanced society when we resort to violence to keep the peace. I will not say that torture is wrong, that is for you to decide, but I do ask you to remember your son, your mother, your father, your wife, and I ask you to remember their faces when you told them you loved them.

Now try to imagine the feelings of the people being tortured. The pain, the unbearable pain, the screaming, the violence, and try to remember that they also told their parents, their son, their wife, or their daughter they loved them. They know love too. They are human beings.

[Back to Index](#)

Tourist

1. Someone who travels for pleasure

In most parts of the world, people are becoming richer, wouldn't you say? And if there's more money to spend you can rest assured that people are going to want to do some serious holidaying. In fact one of the biggest businesses in the world is now tourism. But it's not the two week holidaymaker to the beach we are concerned about here, it is something more profound than that. You see, as I have been observing people recently as they go about their daily business, it came to me that actually the whole human race are really tourists on this planet!

I can hear you muttering and disagreeing already. "Why, the human is the finest species on the planet, look what he has achieved!" Indeed, let's have a look at what the human has achieved.

Spent the last few millennia killing each other.
Spent the last few millennia controlling and killing other animals.
Spent the last few millennia digging up the earth for profit.
Spent the last few millennia cutting down trees for profit.
Spent the last few millennia distancing himself from nature.

And that's just the start!

I'm sure you think I am always being negative, but in terms of what good the human has done for the planet as a whole, we can wholeheartedly say, nothing. That's why it's so hard for people to understand what we are doing here! We work, we earn money, we pay our bills, we bring up a family, and contribute to society (forcibly through taxation). What else is there to do? Oh yes, go on holiday! But the going on holiday is just the final act of tourism, the real tourism involves what we do every day. From work, to school, to the arts, and even to science.

Let me ask you a question. What is our purpose on this revolving mass, in the middle of nowhere? Any idea? Nor have any of us. Some of us think we are here for a higher purpose, some think we have to go through this life before we reach heaven. In fact most people think that the reason we are here is because we are waiting to go somewhere else – sort of like a holding area before you move on to greater things!

It's no wonder that people happily trudge into work every day earning money just to pay the bills and save enough to go on holiday once or twice a year.

The point is, the six billion of us on this planet have long since been an asset, and I include myself in that. We may believe we are here for a higher purpose, but back in reality, which, like it or not, faces us every day, there is a real planet, with real resources, and real animals, and real birds, and real oceans that we trample over.

Let me ask you one more question. If life is give and take, when have humans ever given to the earth? What could we possibly offer an earth that is already in perfect harmony and balance? Nothing. So we just keep on taking, and we argue with each other over whose bit of land it is, and we kill each other over whose god is better. Let's face it, we have become...

Surplus to requirements

Sounds harsh? Well unfortunately, I am yet to be convinced that the human with his large brain, tool making hands, and wanton desire for destruction is doing anything other than being a tourist on this land. A species that was no longer contributing may be expected to go extinct, but oh no, not us, we have used our intellect to overcome nature and control it. Nature no longer rules. We do.

It all seems a bit strange sitting here writing that we are superfluous (*serving no useful purpose; having no excuse for being*). Maybe everyone else worked this out a long time ago and that is why they have attached themselves to a higher purpose! Maybe our ancestors looked at nature and thought: "Well, we control everything now, What's next?"

In our rush to conquer and dominate, we have forgotten one important thing. We are not the only ones on this planet. Yet that seems of no concern to the powerful.

"If they wanted it, they could take it," they say "If only they had the brain power to do it. We are the dominant species, and that's that!"

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

I wonder how many times the same patch of grass has been conquered by different parties, all fighting to the death, all to be able to put up a piece of cloth you call a flag – to stand “triumphant” in battle. All the while the rest of the world just carries on with its daily business. The trees sway in the breeze, the animals graze, the birds sing, the ants keep building their nests. It's almost as if they don't even know we exist. If they have any kind of awareness of humans, they keep it to themselves. What would they be thinking? I know if I were an animal capable of complex thought, I would think: “Whose idea was it to create that species?”

Are you following my line of thought here, or do you find it rather distasteful to be described as surplus to requirements? Don't worry, I'm not singling out any race, or person in particular, I'm talking about all of us.

We spend our leisure time on planes, and boats, and roads, we observe with great interest the giant panda in the cage, we observe with great interest the castle of the queen, we observe with great interest the artefacts in the museum, and all the while the world passes us by...

*The mighty
The powerful
The brave
and other pointless words used to describe humans...*

If I were to try to understand this world, I would see it as a place where different species exist. Where every species has an innate (*not established by conditioning or learning*) purpose, that of keeping the planet in balance – nothing more, nothing less. But we came along, didn't we?

Whether we evolved from the apes, were created by “god,” or flew in from another planet, it doesn't really matter; what matters is what we are up to now, which is basically nothing.

Everything we create is pointless. Everything we create for meaning, has no meaning. Do you understand?

We go to work every day to earn a bit of cash to feed the family, buy stuff, save a bit, and go on holiday.

It doesn't matter whether you are a spaceship designer, a road sweeper, an atomic physicist, a doctor, or a door to door salesman. All the education you have is just so that someone can give you a job. No matter how interesting the job, it is all an illusion, it does nothing to help this planet named earth to survive. In fact most of what we are doing is probably shortening its life by a few years, but we won't be around for that.

We are truly an observer in this world. It's just like sitting in the land rover gazing over the savannah's of africa on our thousand pound safari; observing all the pretty animals and birds, being scared of the ones with big teeth, and knowing we have ultimate control over all that happens here.

We know this because we have created the atomic bomb, and in a matter of hours, we can destroy the whole planet. Every human, every building and most animals.

But after we are gone, there will always be an insect or organism left to keep life going on this planet.

But we will be gone.

No animal or fish will ever remember us because they never knew we were here in the first place, and the world will once again try to regain the balance that the humans destroyed. In summary, it's no wonder people drink alcohol. At least they can find some kind of meaning in the bottom of the glass.

Wake up to what you are doing fellow tourists.
It's time to stop sightseeing and start contributing to creation,
not destruction.

[Back to Index](#)

Travel

1. *The act of going from one place to another*
2. *A movement through space that changes the location of something*
3. *Self-propelled movement*

*Step outside the gate, once in a while,
how the bread smells rich...
the people, the children laughing,
the rich aroma of coffee brewing.
Cross your invisible borders,
and maybe, just maybe, you will step outside yourselves.*

What do you think of when we talk about the word travel? Sunny beaches, bikinis, swimming, relaxation, exotic food, holidays, winter sports, flying, adventure? It could be all of those things, it could be just going on business. Travel overseas is exciting, isn't it? Especially if you haven't been there before. The expectations. What will it look like, smell like, taste like, what will the people be like?

It's fantastic for a holiday, but could you live there?

“Oh no, I couldn't live there, it's too hot, the food's too spicy, the people are too rude, there's no english newspapers, I'd be scared.”

Basically, it's too different from what you know, and what you're used to. I think everyone can understand that, because once your brain gets used to a way of doing things, it doesn't like too much change.

I have travelled extensively during my life, and lived in several countries for extended periods of times, and it *is* hard to adapt. I am now writing this book in the czech republic, but I started it in australia, was born in scotland, and brought up in southern england.

The first thing I noticed is how breakfast is different here. I am used to cereal and a cooked breakfast, followed by toast and jam, whereas the czech people may have a roll with ham and cheese. I drink tea at breakfast, they drink coffee. They have lunch as the main meal of the day, I am used to having a sandwich, and then dinner in the evening. They add butter to the outside of their rolls, I cut the roll and put the butter inside. The food tastes different, smells different, and the combinations are different.

I was once even offered a sweet pasta with ground poppy sauce and fruit compote on the side as a main course, which I told my host I would normally eat as a dessert (if at all)!

So although we have only talked about food, we can already see some major differences between two northern european nations which I believed to be quite similar.

Every country is different. They all have their own language, mannerisms, culture, etiquettes, and we need diversity in the world. But the longer you stay in a country, the more you start to see through all the differences and discover that we are exactly the same! We may look slightly different, or have different skin colour, or behave in slightly different ways, but there is no denying that we are human. That is the most important thing.

Over thousands of years, people have been exploited, murdered, enslaved and judged, because of the colour of their skin, religion, or traditions. Nations of people have been attacked, and attempts have been made to wipe out specific races. Why? Because one nation believes that they are superior. They are superior because of the colour of their skin. They are superior because they are more civilised. The list goes on and on.

There is always someone who can come up with a reason why they are superior to another. “I am white and you are black, therefore I am superior.” Can you see the stupidity in all this? Can this be clear thinking?

It seems crazy when we discuss it here, but that is what's happening all around the world. We have to get underneath the clothes and the skin; the religion and the politics; the food and the traditions. We have to get into the mind of the individual. We have to understand him, to see we are both the same, we are both products of conditioning, of tradition, and culture, and underneath we are all compassionate human beings full of love and generosity. Above all, we have to be interested in someone other than ourselves.

The more interested you become in other people, wherever they come from, the more you will see how much your nationalistic feelings reduce in intensity. When you learn another language, you are not only able to communicate with people, you see that your language is no more important than anyone else's. When you talk to someone about their life, you will see that it mirrors yours, that they are full of the same hopes and dreams.

They want their family to grow up in a peaceful world. They want a good job so they can pay their bills, so they can go on holiday, so they can have a nice house or buy a car. They are the same as you. It is only when you listen to your politicians and the media that you start to dislike, fear, or distrust entire nations of people.

People are the same the world over. They have the same size brain and exactly the same bodies – it's what's inside their conditioned minds that's different that's all; minds full of tradition, culture, politics, religion, media, parents and teachers. But if you take time to listen, to seek out, to spend time with people from other countries, and allow yourself to put aside your conditioning of what they “should” be like, you will find new friends the world over.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

It is only the conditioned minds that can dislike each other. How can you dislike, hate or fear someone you have never met? Surely that doesn't make sense does it? It is thanks to history, and the teachings in school, amongst other things, that we believe we know a whole race, as conforming to a specific type, and apply this knowledge religiously wherever we go.

So when I talk about travel, I am also talking about travelling to a different place in your mind, without the need to fly anywhere. Travel to a place where we are all born exactly the same. Travel to a nursery and watch the chinese, kenyan, japanese, english, german, iranian, or pakistani children as they interact and play together. Do they hate each other? Are they afraid of each other? Do they judge each other? Does one child believe he is superior because he is from one country? Do they not laugh the same when they're happy, cry the same when they're tired and hungry?

Now imagine all of those different children when they grow up to become adults. Imagine what a world we would live in if we were not conditioned. If we could see the adult kenyan, the german, the iranian exactly as they were when we played together in the nursery, before we were burdened by religion, politics, media, and war, could we hate each other? Would we be scared of each other?

For most of us the only time we get to meet individuals from other countries is in our own country, or when we go on our short summer holiday. If we are to live together on this earth happily and peacefully spinning in space, we need to shift our thinking, and get out and explore. Don't just accept what you hear about countries and the people who live there; go and see for yourself.

*Go for longer than a week,
live with languages you don't understand,
with alien traditions, with foods you don't know,
and silently listen to the judge in you;
the voice that mistrusts and fears the unknown.
See through it, and embrace new experience*

*See the individual, not their culture
treat them as you would your family, with kindness.
We may live in different lands,
but to someone coming from a different planet, we are all the same.
Human.*

[Back to Index](#)

U

Unbelievable

1. The way humans treat each other and the planet we share

V

Violence

1. *An act of aggression (as one against a person who resists)*

We all read reports in the newspaper of violence. We see it on television, we see it in films, in computer games. We see it at football matches, in the pub, on the street, and we may even have experienced it in our own homes. Violence is pervasive. It transcends religion, ethnicity, language and culture. It finds its way into all of society. It does not care if you have little education or have a PhD in astrophysics. The intelligentsia may try to suppress it, but given the right stimulus, it is there, ready to rear its ugly head against any who dare to challenge it.

As we begin our discussion today, I would like you to just observe yourself quietly, as you ask the question: “Am I violent?” and “What, if anything would make me violent?”

The answer, will, of course, be different if you are a man or a woman, won't it? After all, how many women do you see fighting on the streets, or attacking people because they support a rival football team? In fact, how many women end up in court or prison for violence related offences? Of course, given the right stimulus, state of mind, and social environment, women are just as capable as men at being violent, but it does not seem to be nearly as widespread.

Think about it for a moment. Violence generally resides in the domain of the male, but what we are here to find out together is why.

*“Oi! What you looking at?”
“Yeah come on then!”
“I'll knock your fuckin' head off!”
“You fucking black bastard come here...”
“Who you calling a...?”*

I am not a social scientist nor a psychologist, but it does seem to me that there are different types of violence in our societies. For example, the ill-educated man may have learned on the streets that anyone looking at him the “wrong” way is an insult, and must be dealt with violently to reassert your superior social “position;” whereas a slightly more educated man wouldn't even notice that someone “looked at him the wrong way,” but may get violent if his girlfriend cheated on him with his best friend. A highly educated man may not care if a man looked at him the wrong way or get violent if his wife cheated on him, but he may resort to calculated violence if his position was under threat by a rival, and may arrange to have him “dealt with” thereby becoming violent by proxy (*a person authorized to act for another*).

Governments are a great example of this. You could not imagine your university educated prime minister involved in a bloody fist fight could you? They stand there in their sharp suits, speaking eloquently, and getting someone else to do their dirty work. They want to fight with another country, but because they are educated (and probably never had a fight in their lives), could not possibly do it themselves, so they employ less educated men to do the real fighting. Perhaps if the leaders just got in the ring to sort out their differences it would save millions of lives! But they wouldn't do that, they are non-violent men, and they would tell you that themselves.

So maybe the ill-educated man on the street is more authentic, at least he shows his true colours to all – the intelligentsia just get someone else to do it.

Whilst it does seem that people who develop their minds do not become as involved in the sad street violence we see in poor deprived areas, it doesn't remove the ability to use violence if an individual deems it necessary, it just means the violence becomes less reactive and more calculated. It does not mean it has been removed.

Are we naturally peaceful or aggressive?

How many scientists have tried to study this? How many philosophers have asked the question? Still we cannot find an answer. Every day someone somewhere is a victim of (usually male originated) violence.

As a species, we are remarkably adaptive, and we can change our personalities and behaviour instantaneously to suit most situations. If a man is brought up in a violent district in the city, he will quickly learn that to be able to survive, he needs to be as violent as the next man. That is not to say that through

education, the development of self-awareness and compassion, he cannot transcend it, no matter what background he comes from.

Remember, some people such as monks live in absolute “poverty,” albeit through choice, and it is rare these days for violence to stem from a lack of food, it is more likely to stem from greed and power – both learned, not inherent.

So, is a baby born with a violent streak passed on to him by his violent father, or is it something that is learned through copying? If a child sees that you get what you want by being aggressive, is he or she not likely to make the connection that that is the right way to behave, in the same way that others learn that being polite is the right way to get what you want? Whatever the case, it appears that the males in the family do have a tendency to be more aggressive than females.

When I asked myself the question earlier: “Am I naturally peaceful?” I thought that no, I wasn't. But I am not naturally aggressive either. So where does that leave me? I believe I personally have the potential to be violent, but situations never arise where I ever have the cause to be, and I have never had a fight in my life! I have got through 38 years of never hitting someone with my fists, and although I may have been hit once in my teenage years, it wasn't a fight. I did something someone didn't like, so they hit me, and that was that.

I have always been quite fit, but never very strong, and I have always had a slight fear that someday someone would attack me, and I wouldn't be able to defend myself. It has never happened, but as I often travel to countries that are unknown to me, I decided to take a course.

I am currently being trained in a technique called the “keysii fighting method” which was developed over thirty years by a spanish man who had spent his youth fighting on the streets. It is extremely brutal, and is designed as a skill to help you survive in a life or death situation. We are taught things like tearing off the cheek or blinding them in the eye with any weapon you have available. It is a technique that could kill if used correctly.

Since starting it, I have felt slightly unsettled in that as a peaceful person, I am actually learning to be aggressive. I am learning to hurt others, and going against my vow to never harm another human being. I am learning to potentially kill if the need arises.

So why learn it?

On the one hand there is fear, the fear of being attacked, but on the other is self-confidence, knowing I can comfortably walk down a street at night alone. Unfortunately with all self-defence techniques, there is the tendency to fantasize about what it would be like to actually be in a fight and use your skills, and that is where trying to overcome fear with violence unsettles me.

The one thing that makes me carry on, is that I understand there are people in the world who are violent, people who need to develop love and compassion, and there is no point in me giving up my life at their hands, just because they do not know their own minds. I have a responsibility to stay alive and contribute to this world.

We cannot let the violent overcome us and destroy us.

Unfortunately, I am all too aware that this is precisely the sort of thinking that starts violence and ends up with powerful people saying that the ends justify the means. Gone is the idea of self-defence and in comes pre-emptive attacks to stop violence from (potentially) happening.

“We cannot let the terrorists win, we will hunt them down and destroy them. We will not give in to cowardly attacks.”

So, as we are seeing in different parts of the world at the moment, government leaders are employing violent thinking to get rid of violent people, although, as you will also notice, they never actively take part. Violence by proxy.

Testosterone

1. *A potent androgenic hormone produced chiefly by the testes; responsible for the development of male secondary sex characteristics*

We have all heard about young men walking around causing trouble fuelled by testosterone, but if one

hormone was solely the explanation to violence it would be easy to fix. We could just give every man with too much testosterone a quick injection of female oestrogen to balance them up!

Certainly, as men get older, and testosterone decreases, there is a marked decrease in violent behaviour. We don't see groups of 75 year old men going around beating people up, even if these were the same violent men, who 50 years earlier, were responsible for brutal behaviour. Maybe it's their hormones, maybe their bodies and minds are tired, and maybe they have learned that violence is not the way, or maybe it's a combination of all three.

So what does it feel like to be violent?

I'm sure most people don't feel bad when they physically attack someone. If anything, I imagine they get a high from it. From the few training sessions I have had in keysi, I know that when you start hitting and kicking, you start to feel the adrenaline flowing. First it's the fear of being hit by your opponent, then quickly you realise that in order to "survive," you have to take them out. Your breathing changes, you start to feel charged up, and even afterwards it takes a while to "come down." The feeling is almost like a drug.

It feels good every time you hit one of the pads. So you hit it a bit harder "Come on... Hit it... Harder... Harder..." shouts the instructor.

You are moving fast, like a wild animal catching your prey. Adrenaline surging through your veins. For a moment you feel alive. You start to recognise what your ancestors must have been feeling when they encountered other tribes or wild animals. The thrill of the chase. The excitement of the kill. The reward at the end. All in a days work for them, but something which should have been long forgotten with the development of our large brains.

Unfortunately, we have the ancient aggressive instincts still in our bodies. We have not grown out of them, merely covered them with education and developed acceptable social behaviour, which if you don't adhere to, you go to prison.

We all know we are still at heart a violent species, but in our desperation to leave the natural world behind, we have created a legal system to deal with "violent people." We have tried to say that it is not the norm, that people are inherently peaceful, and it is with that thinking that people are "made examples of," and sent to prison. But I noticed within myself when "fighting" for the first time in the gym, that it felt good to punch things. I felt as though a new wave of energy was surging through my bones (even some therapists encourage people to punch a pillow when they are feeling aggressive), but as I reflected, I felt, not guilt, but unease, that maybe underneath an outwardly peaceful man, was a violent creature waiting to get out just given the chance.

Most animals fight amongst themselves at some point but generally not to the death (humans are one of the few species who kill their own). They bare teeth, they display, trying to intimidate their opponents, they bite and they scratch and they lock horns, just as humans do, except for some reason we are shocked by it when it is human against human – perhaps because we have been told by our parents, teachers, and government that it is not normal to fight, but it is.

We should have left the old fight or flight mechanism behind thousands of years ago as we developed language and reasoning skills. We learned to cooperate, and started to build social networks. We developed diplomacy skills, and developed ways to live in harmony, but we didn't realise we were going to be held back by our brain. Whilst compassion and love for all humanity are skills that have been developed in the conscious brain, violence remains an unconscious program that sits there until called upon.

Without warning the program can start all by itself.

For those who can't recognise it, violence is just another outdated piece of software in the brain, version 1.0, already obsolete, another useless bolt-on. The only problem is, it hasn't been deleted yet. Maybe it's just going to take a long time for violence to evolve out of us, maybe it never will, and if so, we must learn how to delete it.

Please do me one favour though, and stop blaming it on your lack of money, your social situation, or that you come from a violent family. I appreciate that these things can have an effect on you, but as a fully fledged member of the human race, the most intelligent species on the planet, the only species with a brain complex enough to make decisions like this, you have a choice. A lion has no choice.

Today, you have a choice, to remain violent and listen to your old brain, or go on a journey of peace with your new brain. You can *choose*. You have free will. You may be conditioned to be violent, but you can

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

choose to be a man of peace today. You can vow with me now never to use violence unless it is in self-defence of you your family, or your fellow Man, and only if they are in immediate danger. I vow the same to you.

We must leave our old animalistic selves behind, and forge new connections in the brain. We must expand our minds, not imprison them in history. We may have developed many technical skills, but whilst we rely on ancient programming, we can never truly progress as a species. The day we leave violence behind will be the greatest leap forward for the human mind, human race, and the planet as whole we have seen. It may not happen in my lifetime, but if just one of you makes a shift, you will be affecting the world more than you can possibly imagine.

*I accept that I am violent
and through that acceptance
I can transcend it*

*Through transcendence
I can develop compassion and unconditional love
I can let the past die
and live today in peace*

So the final question is: Should I keep developing self defence skills? Should I learn to protect myself from violent individuals, or should I walk through life preaching peace as some people who have practised non-violence have and be murdered?

I like life. A lot. So I think I'll take my chances with self-defence. As far I'm concerned, I have one life as alan orr, and I'm going to live it to the full. If only everyone knew how to protect themselves, it may just reduce the fear in the world by a couple of degrees. Women would no longer have to worry so much about being attacked by men in the street, as from what I see, some of the self-defence moves are lethal on male "areas" if you know what I mean!

Learn self-defence, develop your instincts and your skill level, and then let it go. Forget you ever learned it. You'll know when it's time to use it. Until then, enjoy your life.

[Back to Index](#)

W

War

1. *The waging of armed conflict against an enemy*
2. *A legal state created by a declaration of war and ended by official declaration during which the international rules of war apply*

So many people have discussed the probable causes of, and possible solutions to, avoiding war, including poets, philosophers and many more learned and intellectual people than myself. But as war has continued raging for thousands of years, I think we all have to admit to ourselves that no one has come up with a solution.

Why? Because war is created by the human mind, not by governments, warlords, despots, or army generals – not even kings. These are just titles that people bestow on themselves, or have others bestow upon them. War is a state of mind, war is a series of connections made in the brain. War is a product of thinking, and it is our thinking, not the actual act that I need to discuss with you here, because it is of the utmost importance.

What is War? War is nothing. War has no meaning. War is not about freedom. War is not about oil, War is not about hate. War is not about nationalism. War is not about ethnic cleansing. These are only words. When the historians look back at war they try to find meaning, to justify the suffering, but in the end, war is just a distant memory.

War is nothing. There was no meaning in the death of your sons and daughters, there was no heroism, no great deeds done worth remembering, no crimes against humanity worth remembering. It was just war, a word that means only one thing. The organised murder of others for an idea. In discussing this with you, I am not attempting to desecrate the memory of your loved ones, I am merely trying to explore the human mind that creates such violence with you.

I sit here writing this book on land that may have staged bloody battles, where soldiers fought hand to hand, with swords and daggers, rifles and pistols, on horseback, on foot, or in tanks; where men suffered in agony, screaming, gasping to take their last breath, in fear, panic, knowing they would die. This was the end, this was it, a life extinguished before its time. This was their finale. Death. For what? Freedom? A just cause? Righteousness?

And now, years later, on this same spot of land, where men may have fought with each other to the death, stands an apartment block, surrounded by trees, with the sound of birds singing, and the occasional car passing by. War is gone, war is no more, the land has been reclaimed by the earth. The earth does not wish to remember, nor wishes to erect a statue of remembrance for the fallen; nature, and so life, just carries on, without a passing care for your dead family and friends.

Like the hundreds of millions who have been killed before, the earth swallows their memory. It is us, the humans who choose to remember, “so this may never happen again.”

Unfortunately, war is created by the human mind, through an absence of love, empathy and compassion for other living creatures, and the earth (that allows us to exist on this small planet together). This mind is invisible to the naked eye. If only we could see into the mind that creates war.

When a child is born, his parents have no idea he is going to become the next tyrant to take over a country, ruthlessly murder his own people, and then fight with anyone who challenges him. To them, he is a child – nothing more.

What makes this child grow into someone who will kill, or send other people to kill, on his behalf? What twisted thinking has developed, that killing other people even becomes an option? Is it just a lack of love by the parents, as some psychologists might propose? But these are not people like the serial killers, and sadistic child murderers we abhor, these are “normal” people. These are people who also abhor murderers, yet become them. They are people like you and me. They are just a product of their environment, their country; conditioned by their parents, their culture, teachers and the media. They are, in fact, brainwashed, and they in turn, brainwash the people.

Brainwash

1. *Persuade completely, often through coercion*
2. *Forcible indoctrination into a new set of attitudes and beliefs*

There can be no other explanation for it. These are people who do not start out as warmongers. You just have to look back through history, right to the present day, to see that leaders – whether military or political – are not generally insane (*afflicted with or characteristic of mental derangement*) in the medical sense, (although one could argue that their actions do not seem like that of a sane human being), or they would not have been voted into power, either by the people or the political party, or even by other soldiers.

On the contrary, these are people who probably have a good standard of education, probably have wives and children (nearly all leaders of countries are men), may have strong religious, moral and ethical beliefs, and probably believe they are doing the right thing for the people and the country. These are not criminals or madmen.

Whether the controlling party is democratically elected, or declares themselves “elected” without the mandate of the people, someone has had to elect a leader, and that leader will not be a drooling madman, rocking in the corner. He will be confident and eloquent, able to make people listen to his ideas for glory for the nation. He will convince people he is right, that his views are the only way forward, and people listen to a convincing speaker. In order to declare war on another country the people must believe in their leader and they must be convinced he is in the right, otherwise war is not an option.

Leaders may declare war, but they don't go to war on their own, otherwise it would be no more than a bar room brawl, or a fight in the school yard between two men, even if it was to the death. People go to war, people like you and me. Normal, well adjusted, conditioned, brainwashed people, who happily give up their lives for “the greater good” of the nation. No one goes to war for the greater good of the planet, that would be somewhat paradoxical, don't you think?

You cause war. You and you alone are responsible for war.

You may be disgusted by what I have just said. You may be in the army and think you are only doing your job, but you are going to war for one man's idea. But it is also your idea, how else could one man force you to kill in his name? You sign up, sometimes of your own volition, sometimes because you are forced to, and some may argue that they would have been killed themselves if they did not go to war, but if everyone refused to go to war, would the leader kill all of his own people? Perhaps, but then he would have no one to lead, rendering him powerless, and leading is all about power.

Behind every leader, there is someone complicit in the idea, and that person is you, even if you never pick up a rifle in your life. You agree with him, and you believe him, that is all that is necessary to start a war.

How many of you have fought in wars, lost loved ones in battle, or had family members killed? How many of you have lost great friends? For what? Freedom? Good vs. Evil? Fighting to protect what is right? Fighting for your own interests over another's?

Why?

Because you were convinced that what you were doing was right. You would not have gone to war otherwise, would you?

Are you so afraid of what will happen to you if you do not go to war? The people are the power of the nation, even unarmed. They have the power to stand up as a collective and say: “No! I will *not* fight”, but you don't, because the leader has appealed to your nationalistic pride. The pride, which is conditioning, that has been developed over centuries. The pride that makes you say: “I am proud to be british,” and whatever is in the best interests of Britain, I will do it. You just tell me where to sign up. We'll show that other country not to mess with us.

Let's go back to the child before he became a leader for a moment, shall we? The young man destined to send millions of people to their death... Who was he? Was he normal?

You see, I am not talking about psychopathic lunatics here, I am talking about your leaders, most of whom have been democratically elected.

His parents, or guardians, probably instilled a fine sense of pride in him. He was taken to watch parades, where he happily waved his flag for the nation, he was taught history, and learned what a great country he came from, he was in fact being conditioned without his knowledge into becoming a patriot (*one who loves and defends his or her country*). He sang the national anthem at sports matches, and screamed in excitement with all the adults when his country scored. He believed his leader, teachers, parents, and media were telling

him the truth when they said they had to go to war to protect freedom, and their way of life; or they had to go to war because a neighbouring country had stolen land or assets that were rightfully theirs. Without knowing it, he had been indoctrinated. The flag, which is just a piece of coloured cloth, became his symbol of freedom. The army became the method with which to uphold that freedom, and the child became a man.

There are a million reasons why countries start wars, but they always start with an idea that whatever they are doing it is right. They must also identify an enemy (*any hostile group of people*) who must be fought and overwhelmed, for no other reason than the leader, and subsequently, the followers, believe they have right on their side. They are not fighting over universal truths like love and compassion – as these exist within each and every one of us, and do not need a bullet to enforce – they are fighting over nothing more than children in the school yard fight over:

“That's my pen and I want it back,” or “I want your pen, give it to me now, or else!” or “give me your lunch money, I haven't got any,” or “I hate you, I want to fight you!”

Countries have no more to fight over than children; nothing they are fighting about is as serious as they want you to believe it to be. What is serious, is that the leaders and governments (who are just people too) involve us in school yard fights that kill millions of people. You can forgive children, for their minds are not yet fully developed, but adults have no excuse – except perhaps that they do not know their own minds.

A mind that is filled with love, compassion and empathy, can never send another human being to kill, no matter what the cause; and a mind filled with love, compassion and empathy can never fight, let alone kill another human being, whatever the cause. There is no right and wrong, these are man-made concepts. There is only love, compassion and empathy. If you can find those three things in your mind, you will never start, take part in, or agree with another war. Ever. It really is that simple.

People will always try to convince us they're right.

“Look, *we* are the compassionate loving ones in *this* nation, and that other *bad* nation wants to destroy us, and take away everything we've got so we have *no* choice but to go to war. We have no quarrel with the people of the country; we are only destroying legitimate military targets,” they say.

So we all think, “Oh, that's all right, they're only killing the military (who are not people).”

What do you think the people of the country under attack think of this? Does it not start to stir nationalistic feelings in them too, to see their soldiers, who you remember are someone's husband, son or brother being killed by a bullet or a bomb? Do you not think their leaders will use this as a way to brainwash their citizens into hating your country? In fact, if I saw my husband cut down in a hail of bullets, it may not need any brainwashing to convince me to pick up a gun and fight.

War creates more war, that is sure. It is a never ending cycle of idea, indoctrination, and ultimately death. There is never a winner, only losers. And the biggest loser of all is the human emotion, compassion. War slowly erodes love and compassion, and in their absence hate fills the void. Understand your own mind, and see that whatever the justification for war, it can never pass the test of “is it compassionate and loving?”

I remember a story about the impromptu football match that took place between the british and the germans on christmas day, during the first world war. Well, apparently, it really happened. Both sides put down their weapons and played football on no man's land, proving that the soldiers didn't hate each other at all, they had just been indoctrinated by their leaders. For that small window in time, they knew their own minds, and they knew their “enemy” could have been a friend they played football with every saturday; if only he hadn't been born in different country.

It is a real shame they resumed killing each other the very next day.

We have been at war for so many years now, in some shape or form, that maybe we have forgotten what it is to be human. We boldly stand and tell people that ours is the greatest country on earth. What a boast. Great, is what the earth is. Great, is the diversity of wildlife. Great, is the atmosphere that protects us from the sun's rays. Great, is the water that runs through the rivers. Great, is being alive.

Given that the chance of becoming human was so small, great, is getting the chance to experience this amazing planet, that is our home. There is no time to be at war with each other, we live for such a short time, perhaps 80 or 90 years at best. Let us live every day with joy and laughter just at being here, and getting the chance to make a small contribution to an evolving planet that has been here for four billion years.

One chance to do something good, and what do we bring to it in our short life? Violence, death and suffering. The most intelligent species on earth?

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

If nature had known what we would have turned into, maybe we would have been naturally selected out of the evolution process, and remained a single-celled mindless organism. Oh sorry, I forgot, that *is* what some of us have become.

*If all you can do in this life is be kind to someone,
you have done more than was ever expected of you.
You have shown you were truly human,
and that everything the earth went through to get you here, was worth it.*

[Back to Index](#)

Waste

1. *Any materials unused and rejected as worthless or unwanted*
2. *Useless or profitless activity; using or expending or consuming thoughtlessly or carelessly*
3. *The trait of wasting resources*
4. *Spend thoughtlessly; throw away*
5. *Use inefficiently or inappropriately*

I don't know about you, but I like going to restaurants. It's nice to get dressed up and go out for a meal. It saves cooking (and the washing up), and you get to try all sorts of different food you wouldn't get at home. In the west, going out for a meal has become commonplace. For a lot of us, eating out is just like any other activity we do, it doesn't have to be a special occasion anymore. We have the money to do it so why not? Let me start this discussion by telling you a story.

Over the past few years, whilst travelling, I found work cooking in several pub kitchens. I am not a trained chef, but somehow I fell into it. I found the work quite easy, and quite satisfying and it was a good feeling cooking lunch for two hundred people on a Sunday. Anytime I was short of travelling money, I found work as a chef. It was during this period I (a) became vegetarian, (b) learnt a lot about myself, and (c) learned about how much we waste.

The pointless existence of a restaurant lettuce...

I don't know about your country, but in the UK it is commonplace to provide a “garnish” with the meal, which is basically a small side salad comprising lettuce, tomato, cucumber, and maybe some mixed peppers, or coleslaw, and a salad dressing (oil and vinegar). For several thousand meals I carried on putting the side salad on without a thought. Then one day, I had a moment of clarity, and I became aware of my actions.

I was mid-way through scraping the almost untouched side salad off a plate and into the bin, when it came to me. “Someone has grown this food from a seed (maybe even in a different country) and I am throwing it into a bin where it will become compost or more likely landfill!” So I created a little flow chart which went something like this.

Take a seed and plant it which requires peat/compost water, labour, and a plastic container if it is not grown in the field directly from seed (and electricity if it's on a production line). The seed is nurtured using water, electricity and labour. The seed needs space to grow and so a field is needed. The lettuce is constantly watered and may be sprayed with chemicals, which requires labour. At the allotted time, the lettuce is harvested, which uses labour. The lettuce is washed at the farm which uses water, labour, and electricity. The lettuce is packed, which requires plastic, and labour. The lettuce is transported to either a distribution point, or market, which uses fuel and labour. The lettuce is purchased by the pub or restaurant, which requires money, labour and fuel to deliver it. The lettuce is then stored in a refrigerator, which uses electricity. The lettuce is then washed a minimum of two to three times to make sure there are no bugs left in it, which uses water and labour. The lettuce is then stored in the fridge which again uses electricity. The order comes up for a steak and chips (with a garnish of course), and the lettuce (and all the other salad ingredients which also have had to follow the same process) is served onto the plate, which uses labour. The meal is delivered to the customer, which requires labour. The customer eats the steak and chips and ignores the lettuce. The lettuce is then transported back to the kitchen which uses labour. The lettuce is put in the bin using labour. The bin is then put outside using labour. The rubbish is collected using labour and fuel, and something happens to it (either burial, or maybe composting if we're lucky) which uses fuel and labour. Any questions?

Please feel free to go over this again if you feel there is a point you would like to argue.

Over and over, I saw this happening, until one day I decided to put a stop to it. I told the management I was no longer going to be putting something on a plate that was being ignored as it was a complete waste of food, which is precious (maybe not to us, but think of the people who are starving). Do you know what? They weren't even interested. I was told to keep putting it on as customers “liked a bit of greenery” on their plate. It didn't matter what they left on their plate, because “it was all included in the price.”

This really shocked me. I tried to explain that just because we had paid the farmer, and the customer had paid us, didn't make it right to waste food. I was told to either keep doing it or “if I didn't like it, I could find another job,” which I did.

I couldn't believe how irresponsible people were. How could they not care that we were wasting so much? The more I looked into waste, the more I realised that the only thing that was important to businesses was

getting paid, and the only thing that was important to the customer was getting what he wanted. After he had paid for it, it was nobody's business what he did with it.

Easy come, easy go. That should be the motto of the developed world these days, especially in massive consumer countries like the usa, uk, and australia (and any other country that values these ideals). We have no idea of the process to get a product from concept to the consumer, and the amount of input and effort required or the number of people involved. But then it hit me. Whether we needed the product, or even used it, didn't matter a damn. What was important were the steps in between. These steps created the wealth of the country, and kept people in jobs.

How many times have you been into bargain stores and picked up some plastic rubbish made in china for £1.00? You certainly didn't need it, it wouldn't last long before falling to bits, and you probably wouldn't use it. You bought it because it was there, and you wanted it!

It seems to me that waste is an inevitable consequence of economic development. There are only so many things that people (or the country) really need in life, and that wouldn't keep everyone in jobs. So they have to produce things that people don't need or in the case of that poor side salad, don't even want in order that people stay in work. Think about it.

If the pub I worked for didn't buy 100 lettuces a week for their pointless side salads, what would happen to the poor old farmer? He needs to make a living too you know! What if everyone decided not to put garnishes on the plate as eye candy? The farmer would get no more orders, he wouldn't be able to pay his bills, and pretty soon he would be broke. And we know what could happen there don't we? He would start to drink heavily, he would become a burden on the taxpayer, his self-esteem would diminish, and he wouldn't be able to pay his own taxes anymore, which would mean that the government would have less money to spend on essential projects such as defence.

"Look, let's save ourselves all this trouble, and be good consumers and keep demanding a garnish on your plate" says the minister.

"Don't deny us our Garnish" will be on the placards waved wildly by stooges from the garnish industry.

"Don't worry farmers" says the minister, whilst attempting to pacify the angry mob. "Pretty soon, the consumer will come round, then you'll all be back in business"

Cheers and shouts of "Hoorah!" can be heard up and down the country...

It seems that waste is acceptable as long as people keep their jobs, because let's face it, if people didn't want to change their car every two minutes, or upgrade their bathroom suite or kitchen, or buy a new pc every six months, what would all the people who work in those industries do? They wouldn't be able to work for eight hours a day, and there wouldn't be enough work to go around for everybody. They would all have to be moved to part time, and then some may lose their jobs. If business is still slow, the companies will close down, making everyone unemployed. and leaving the government with the problem.

As far as a government is concerned, a little bit of waste is far better than a lot of people out of work. Come election time, the unemployed may decide to vote for a government who can provide them with work. Waste vs. Votes. Easy choice, no?

Maybe you don't realise that everything we buy has had to come from somewhere? Materials do not just magically appear in the atmosphere. All materials have come from the earth. The computer I write on, the desk I sit at, the chair I sit on, the window I look out from, the curtains that adorn the window, the curtain rail, the screws that hold it into the wall. The building I sit in, the pen I write notes with, the notebook I write them in, and the cup I drink from.

Considering the industrial revolution started only a couple of hundred years ago, and global consumerism has only been around for thirty or forty years, we are consuming raw materials at a massive rate don't you think? What do you think is going on in the factories around the world at this moment? Whilst you are reading about waste, tens of millions of people are engaged in making something we may or may not need, just so they can have a job!

I am not against people having jobs, far from it, we all need to work to provide for ourselves, but it is the choice of work we undertake, and the products we make that is vitally important to the earth. We are literally eating our planet away from the inside out. We dig, and we dig, we drill and we drill, we chop and we chop. For what? Progress?

I have often sat and watched people dropping rubbish off at the local "tip" (they do separate a lot now, so

more recycling is done) and the sheer volume of “rubbish” that people don't want anymore amazes me. With so many eye catching products on sale, at dirt cheap prices or on long interest free credit terms people feel compelled to upgrade. They love the latest gadgets. They must have them. They must have something new. In my mind this is nothing more than a simple addiction.

People are conditioned to believe that buying new “stuff” is why you work. It is a right, a privilege, you have earned, by going out to work for forty hours a week. You are *Entitled*. Of course this is just marketing hype from the government and the companies making the products, but you begin to believe it. That is the reason to go to work. Not for the benefit of mankind, but to buy new stuff. What a waste.

Let's go into this really carefully, shall we? Why do we believe we are entitled to waste the earth's resources? Remember, most things we mine and dig for are millions of years old and will take millions of years more to be created again (if ever). Are we really that uncaring that we would leave future generations with nothing but a used and abused planet?

“Thanks very much,” our descendants will say. “You screwed it all up for us when we weren't even born, just so you could satisfy your desires. Desire to have a big house. Desire for status. For a big car. For lots of money in the bank.”

And that's it isn't it? Whatever we do we do for money. Just for the sake of money and having nice material things you can't take with you when you die! Imagine your epitaph: “John Smith. Died. 2007. He took what he could, and put two fingers up to the rest of the world. He loved his family though.”

There are those of us in the world, including you, who care what happens to our planet. After all, it's the only one we've got. So what is the answer to this problem of waste, which goes on, not only in the poor old consumer's house, but also on a much, much larger scale in manufacturing and the service industries? Not by telling people to use less, that's for sure!

As we have discussed earlier on, people feel entitled to use and waste things as long as they've paid for them. They don't care that the cost of the inputs far outweigh the final output. They want to enjoy themselves. They want to spend the money they have earned working hard all week. “Don't spoil our fun” they say. “After all I do, I'm entitled to enjoy myself a little, aren't I?” Entitled (*Qualified for by right according to law*).

**

One of the “little” pleasures that British folk enjoy, is the traditional English breakfast. A massive affair, which contains many items, enjoyed at the weekends, in cafe's, hotels and bed and breakfasts throughout the country.

Full English Breakfast Menu

Selection of Juices

Cereal or Porridge

~

Eggs (done as you like)

Sausage

Bacon

Mushrooms, Tomatoes

Hash Browns or Fried bread

~

Tea or Coffee

~

Toast with a selection of jams or marmalades

To most people, that is just a nice menu of tasty items to be enjoyed at breakfast. To me, it represents massive (that word again) inputs, and like most restaurant food is from the cheapest source around.

To start with, the fresh juice is likely to be made from concentrate, but more importantly, imported from a country that is able to produce cheap fruit juice which requires labour, packaging, and transportation to get to the breakfast table, followed by porridge or cereal which has to be grown from corn or maize in enough quantities to make it economically viable to grow, and requires land, labour, transport, processing, and

electricity, followed by bacon or sausage which requires a pig to be reared, fed, fattened, and watered before being slaughtered, processed, packaged, stored and transported, which uses fuel, electricity, labour. However you like your eggs, they require chickens to be kept laying their whole un-natural life. The eggs then have to be stored and processed, before being delivered. Tomatoes and mushrooms must be grown, which uses water, and labour, and electricity for processing, followed by fuel for transportation. The tea and coffee are required to be imported from a country far away, using ships or planes, which pollute the environment, and sugar to taste, and milk to be added. Followed at long last by the toast which is wheat, which must be processed and turned into flour which is then processed into bread and baked and delivered, topped with butter from the cow which must be milked every day, and the milk churned to make butter, which is wrapped and transported.

Phew this is tiring me out writing this! Are you tired reading it yet?

Last but not least there is the jam or marmalade which must be harvested from oranges or strawberries, packed and transported to the jam factory where sugar must be added. It must be packaged and transported, which as you know uses....

I'm glad that's over, because it probably took me longer to write those sentences than it would for you to eat your full english breakfast!

You may think this is an extreme example but you can substitute “full english breakfast” for any product. You can then look at the real cost of the product you are buying. For example, when you go to buy a table, a car, a house or a window, do you consider the environmental inputs? Of course not. How about when you stay at a hotel or you shop at a supermarket? If, like me, you decide to consider the environmental inputs, and not just the finished products or price, you will find that not only will you drive yourself mad but you will drive the rest of your family and friends, not to mention the salesman, MAD!

Consider the environmental inputs before you buy
Do the inputs cost more than the final output?

So is it worth bothering with? You tell me. I think it is! But a much easier method would be to turn this whole thing on its head, and instead of making it the consumer's responsibility, make it the supplier's. Make them tell us what the environmental (and social) costs that went into making their products, so we can make an informed decision as to whether or not to make a purchase. Simple eh? This could be a benefit for the supplier as well. People are happy to pay for a product that has been produced in a manner that respects the environment in which we live. There is a growing movement of people, like you, who are not prepared to waste any more of our natural resources on frivolous products and activities.

Simplicity

1. *The quality of being simple or uncompounded*
2. *Absence of affectation or pretence*
3. *Lack of ornamentation*

Now before you all start complaining that I am preaching we should all live like austere monks on wooden mattresses on the floor, let's examine what it means to be simple. Does this mean you have to stop wearing normal clothes and wear one home spun piece of cloth? Does this mean you cannot enjoy your life anymore? Does this mean you mustn't have a nice house with a garden or take a bath every day? No, of course it doesn't.

Simplicity is not external, and that is one of the biggest errors people make. It is not about getting rid of your car, growing your own vegetables or living in a mud hut in the forest complaining about the evils of capitalism. Simplicity is in your mind, and can exist only in your mind, although that will affect your external actions.

So how do we learn to be simple; how do we rid ourselves of desire and greed?

The first step is awareness. Awareness of yourself in action. You must watch yourself closely. Awareness

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

is that fraction of a second between thinking about something, and doing it. In that split second, we have to learn to let compassion in. Love, empathy and compassion as you will remember from other topics are the three keys to life. This is of course only my opinion, and I urge you to test them. Do not take my word for it.

Once you have discovered awareness, you will free yourself of desire and greed, and the urge to be wasteful will be like a dream you had many years ago. Things you once thought were important to you will no longer enter your mind.

I spent my entire twenties being wasteful, although I felt no guilt at being responsible for so much waste. I just didn't care about anything apart from what I could get for me; whatever the cost. I was so greedy. I wanted everything, and I wanted it right now. I wasn't prepared to wait. I didn't care if the table I bought came from an unsustainable rainforest or the salad I bought that came prepared in a bag, had been produced in an african country, where there was scarce enough water for the local people. I was not a bad person, I just wasn't aware that my actions had far reaching consequences. It was not until I developed awareness that I realised what I was doing.

Life is a learning process and I will not say that I am simple in my mind, but every day, I try to be more aware of myself, and the effect I have on the world. In the end that is the best you can do. The rest will fall into place.

[Back to Index](#)

Water

1. *A fluid necessary for the life of most animals and plants*
2. *[archaic] Once thought to be one of four elements composing the universe (Empedocles)*
3. *Binary compound that occurs at room temperature as a clear colourless odourless tasteless liquid; freezes into ice below 0 degrees centigrade and boils above 100 degrees centigrade; widely used as a solvent*

Water, our most precious resource for sustaining life on the planet, not just for humans but for all the other inhabitants of this earth. Approximately seventy percent of the earth's surface is covered by oceans; the catch being that all land animals need fresh water to survive, not salt water, that is why a man cast adrift at sea would die of thirst! This seems illogical, doesn't it?

As land dwellers, we are reliant on the water from rivers, lakes and streams. Without this water we would die, as would the animals and the plants, although we could live without food for a couple of weeks quite comfortably.

Like the earth, we are made up of approximately seventy percent water, and we were surrounded by water for nine months in our mother's belly, so it's no wonder we love to play in the ocean, dive into swimming pools and take long luxuriating baths or showers. Water is an intrinsic part of our life. It is involved at all stages of our life from conception through to death.

Water is also one of the four elements that ancient scientists and philosophers thought constituted the physical universe, as well as fire, air and earth.

H₂O, as it is known scientifically, is a binary compound that occurs at room temperature as a clear colourless odourless tasteless liquid; freezes into ice below zero degrees centigrade and boils above one hundred degrees centigrade. A truly versatile little compound!

Imagine if you will, your typical day. Imagine the part that water has to play in it. Everything from the cup of tea or coffee you start the day with, to the water you shower in, to the water that helps the vegetables grow before you can boil or steam them, to make them easier to consume. Think about this quietly for a moment. The connection between life and water is undeniable and although it is necessary to sustain all life on earth, we don't seem to get it do we?

Everything on this planet is in perfect balance (except us). In each area, there is enough water and food to sustain a specific amount of life, and no more. So what happens when you build a city? Well, you need massive amounts of water which must be fed from other areas to supply the needs of the people. Water that has been running in an area for thousands of years is taken and transported over many hundreds of miles so you can have a double espresso and a bottle of sparkling water "to go."

You are in your kitchen and you reach over and turn on the fountain of life, what goes through your mind? If you're like everyone else, probably nothing. Do you know what I see? I see life running through man-made pipes, pumped, filtered, and treated. I see water that is no longer pure, that no longer contains the energy it did at the source, that has been fundamentally altered by Man. But then that's just my opinion!

Back to the tap, and as you turn it on, the water runs out, but before you catch it, it runs away again. Water is so slippery you have to be really alert to catch it!

"So what's all this got to do with me?" I hear you asking.

Well, as usual, it's back to the whole waste thing again, I'm sorry to say. Not only have we diverted water away from its natural flow, we have dammed rivers, flooded valleys, and created huge reservoirs, which have forever changed the ecology of particular areas – all so we can live in industrialised cities. There is no connection to the stream where you gather water or the well you dig in your garden – the man-made tap sees to that.

Where does it come from, this water stuff? Do you know where your water comes from? Most of you will no doubt quote your water company's name, but please stop, and think about this. If we are in agreement that water is one element that gives life, surely we should know where it comes from!

*From an ice cube in your drink to a steam bath
From steam engine to the ice skating rink
From the polar ice caps to the children playing in the snow
Water holds life together in all of its wondrous forms*

As I have explained in other topics, I am currently writing at a small "spiritual" community on an island in Scotland. As they have no mains water, this morning I took a walk to find out how we get it. I traced it back from the solar heated hot water tanks to the main tank which has a ultraviolet light filter to remove any harmful bacteria (sorry for killing you, bacteria), the pipe runs up the hill to a primary holding tank, which

then has three plastic pipes inserted. I traced these 100 metres to a small hole dug into the hillside. Inside was water flowing down from the hill and going out again through a perforated plastic pipe. Is that it? Where is all the fancy machinery?

I made enquiries to the maintenance man, and was assured that the water came from natural springs, and that the system was simple. Water from a spring one hundred metres away through to my tap. Perfect. I could see the whole process, from start to finish!

How many of us have ever enquired to our many privately owned water companies how the whole process works for millions of people? I think it would be very different to the system we have here which provides uninterrupted water supplies for 60 people, most of the time – except in the summer when the springs have been known to almost dry up! What a sight that must be, to see the one thing that keeps you alive dry up.

Seeing your water supply dry up must be like looking death in the face. Millions of people have this problem in the driest countries on earth, but once again there are too many people competing for small supplies of water.

I often wonder how the tribes people of africa have managed to survive all these years, when every day I see pictures of people dying of thirst and walking up to twenty miles just to fetch water. How did they survive?

For a start there were not as many of them. Nature provided for a specific number of people and when the people started to gather in one place instead of many areas (for work), nature's supply ran out. Of course if you live "in the west" you won't have to look death in the face when the water runs out. They'll just pump it in from somewhere else! After all, you pay for your water, who's to tell you to use less?

"Water is a human right," you cry, "I am entitled to water. I don't care where you get it from, just get it!"

Government advertising campaigns in countries such as australia, are urging people not to wash their cars, not to water their lawns, and to turn off the tap when brushing their teeth, but just down the road, people are sitting in retail precincts and restaurants where all the vegetables are washed two to three times, and water is being used frivolously washing plates, and cups and serving cappuccinos. When the customers have finished eating, they all go to the toilets and flush, flush, flush, and wash their hands in plentiful supply. Somehow or other, this "*SAVE WATER OR WE ALL DIE*" campaign, loses its authenticity.

Consumers are told to save water at home, but businesses seem to be exempt. Surely we shouldn't be so cynical as to think that this has to do with money? That if people stopped using retail establishments as much during water shortages, it may create an economic crisis, and people would start losing their jobs, which would have a knock on effect, which meant the unemployed would be a burden on society, and the government would lose its tax dollars! Surely not?

One thing you may or may not be aware of is that business is by far the biggest consumer of water. Investigate it for yourselves. The laptop I am writing this book on required huge amounts of water in its manufacture! Am I crazy? As you will discover, the electronics industry is the one of single largest consumers of water! Making these high-tech semiconductors requires water. Lots of it. I wonder if you could guess what else requires water in its manufacture?

So before we all start sharing bath water between a family of four, maybe we should look at our choices outside the home. The place where no one can monitor our use of water resources. Maybe the reason we all comply at home is fear. Fear that we will be found out. And maybe even at home we don't really care, water being a "human right," and all.

I did consider some time ago that water is a human right and that it should be provided for all, at no cost, but then I remembered we were talking about human beings here, the most intelligent, but most wasteful species on the planet, who at every opportunity live for "me." If people can get away with something they do. That is why in the topic on law I concluded that the human race wasn't ready to get rid of law. If there was free water, they wouldn't use it carefully and thoughtfully, they would keep using it until it ran out, and then complain that it had run out and someone should be doing something about it!

So, charging people for what they use seems the only way at the moment. We are not ready to be given unlimited access to something so precious. Isn't that a terrible shame? It fills me with sadness to think we don't care about water. It is vital to life, so perhaps we should start preserving it. We must see it not as a commodity to be traded, or something to be wasted, but must start to see every drop as being a part of us, and

we of it. We are linked, bonded by the molecules in it. It is our life. Let's not throw away our life.

Treat water in the same way you treat your family – with tenderness and care. Save it. Don't let rainwater run off your roof and into the gutter – use it to water your vegetable garden. Recycle it. You can use it again! There are systems that use old bath water to flush the toilets etc. Amazing, isn't it?

Next time you run your tap, try to imagine the source, and try to reconnect with it. You may not live as close to the source as I do, but try to ask yourself *why*. Why do you not live close to the source? Ponder that question for a while. You may be surprised at the answer. On the other hand you may not!

Fire

1. *[archaic] Once thought to be one of four elements composing the universe (empedocles)*
2. *The process of combustion of inflammable materials producing heat and light and (often) smoke*
3. *The event of something burning (often destructive)*

I don't think any of us really know when man first discovered fire, but it would have been pretty amazing sight to witness. From a single spark came heat and light. It took several billion years of life on earth before we finally harnessed (by accident probably) the power that brings life to our planet every day – the power of the sun, before that. We would have been eating raw everything, and it would have been pretty cold in the northern hemisphere in winter!

Every minute of every day, the sun generates enough energy to sustain this planet. Too much heat and we would all die, too little, and life could not carry on. A pretty fine balance, wouldn't you say?

Plant life is incredible on earth. They take in energy from the sun, and use it to split water from the ground into hydrogen and oxygen. The hydrogen released from the water combines with carbon dioxide to make sugar, the fuel that the plant needs to grow. The final stage is the release of oxygen, which we all know, allows us to breathe. So without this process, enabled by the sun, we would all die.

I sit at my desk having washed my hands with solar powered hot water, well in this country it is only lukewarm, but it is enough to heat the water somewhat. Free energy from the sun? I like it!

Sorry to interrupt myself, but I must just quickly tell you this story.

Just last week I downloaded some designs for solar cookers from the internet, and it is amazing what you can do with a piece of cardboard, and some aluminium foil. Without getting into the technicalities here too much, you basically shape your cooker so it reflects heat onto a black pot, which you put into a clear oven bag.

On the website, I saw photographs of happy african women using their solar cookers, but I didn't imagine it would work in england in may! How amazed I was, to come back and check on my risotto, two hours later, and find it had been cooked to perfection (the great thing is, the ovens do not burn the food, as the heat is much more gentle than a conventional oven. Since that day, I have cooked all manner of different food, including baked potatoes, curries, and bread!

For something that was designed to help people in the poorest countries in the world, it was fantastic to use it in a country, which, although not desperate, needs to find better solutions to their energy problems. Here I was, a westerner, cooking my lunch and dinner with the power of the sun. And do you know what the best thing about it was? The energy was free!

I now propose that we have an "international solar cooking day," which I would be happy to help organise. You see, I think they were missing the point with these solar cookers, they aren't only for people in desperate need of fuel to cook with, they are also fun, easy to use, and save huge amounts of energy. We could get children from schools interested, and they can pester their parents!

We shouldn't look at it as a "save the earth day," like those annoying environmental groups organise, we should see this as fun! Something that could take the place of the traditional family barbecue (which uses lots of natural resources by the way). It may be more difficult to grill things, but hey! You're the most intelligent species on the planet, I'm sure you'll figure out a way!

Imagine for one moment will you, that even one tenth of the population used a solar cooker to cook some food, even three times a year (most countries get a lot more sun than that), how much energy do you think we would save?

Have a think about it.

Unfortunately, solar power is not the only answer for us in the north of Europe, but neither is the way it is produced now. But for now, let's get back to our main discussion.

Following the same principal as the water topic, I would like you to imagine the source of the light in your lounge, or the heat in your radiators. Electricity is generally created by burning coal, and if you have ever had a coal fire, you will know how much coal you would have to use if you wanted to heat the whole house. Well I'll tell you. It's a lot. An awful lot. And someone has to dig for this coal.

Have you ever seen photos of coal miners coming up from the mine a mile below ground all covered in black dust? Well they're digging for your electric light, they're digging to power your tv, they're digging to power the microwave.

Coal (*fossil fuel consisting of carbonized vegetable matter deposited in the Carboniferous period*), as you can see from its dictionary definition, has been around a long time. I cannot be sure personally, but science has told us it was created from about 345 million to 280 million years ago! Science has also told us that we are running out, and it is bad for the environment to burn carbon based fuels. Oops. Oh well, I won't be around that much longer anyway. What about you?

So should we bother worrying about it? Well if you care that your children have a planet left to enjoy, we better start doing something, say the scientists. But what?

Nuclear energy, which is energy released by a nuclear reaction, is on the surface, greener than coal, but unfortunately the waste created during this process is highly radioactive, and needs to be buried somewhere (not in my back garden thanks) so remains controversial. Natural gas is seen by some as greener than coal, but like everything, that takes millions of years to form, gas is going to run out too. Help! We're all going to die!

One of the main problems, as I see it, is not that we need to urgently find renewable sources, but that we consume too much. As usual the wasteful human (that's you and me by the way) is chomping his way through the earth's natural resources at an alarming rate. "Save electricity," the government cries, or do they? In fact, we are never really told to save electricity – after all, it is a human right to have light, isn't it? We have our kitchens to think about, our games consoles, our computers, our televisions, and our tumble driers. We have bought all this stuff from our hard earned wages! We are entitled to use them, are we not?

A few years ago, I learned a good lesson about electricity and how it doesn't grow on trees. I was working on a farm saving money to go travelling, and was staying on-site in a mobile home. The electricity was on a coin fed meter, and I had to remember to put a pound in every day or so, to keep everything in the cabin going. It was only when it ran out one day, and I didn't have any coins to put in the meter I realised how dependent we all are on electricity. Everything in my life needed power. My computer, my television, the cooker, the fridge, the freezer, the shower, the lights, the heater.

As I sat in the dark for a short while I made the connection. All of modern life required electricity. Without it we were nothing. Whether it is generated by nuclear, gas, solar, or coal, we are addicted to it. Industry couldn't run without it, so they could not make the products we buy that rely on it. Modern life, as I know it, would fail to exist.

One switch, and twenty-first century life as I knew it would end. That scared me. All the things I liked doing. Watching dvd's, having nice cold drinks in the summer, freezing extra food I had made, heating food quickly in a microwave.

Then it really dawned on me that this wasn't just about my cabin not having electric for one night, this was about not being able to do anything I liked. There would be no going to a restaurant, day or night, because there would be no one way to cook the food, let alone turn a light on. Cinemas would be obsolete because no one would be able to edit the films, let alone show them. I wouldn't have a computer anymore because there would be no electricity to make it, let alone plug it in and turn it on. I was shocked. The world as I knew it was an illusion. This was not reality.

Unplug us from the grid and the dark ages would return.

Fortunately, the next day I remembered to get some change, and I quickly forgot the previous night like a bad dream. But it stuck in my head, and I started to pay more attention to what I was using. I didn't take electricity for granted anymore. I could see that unless someone came up with a way of providing self-regenerating energy, we would soon be looking for new hobbies in the evening that work well around candle

light. (at least we still have fire, imagine what life was like before they discovered it).

But hold on, we have energy from the sun. Sure, it might not be as efficient in some parts of the world, but as long as the financial and environmental cost of producing solar panels was acceptable, it would be a start.

I was living in Australia not long after my experience in the dark, and I decided to look up on the roofs to see how many people were using solar panels. I could not believe it! Almost nobody had them. Australia, as it turned out, was a country that not only had enough sunlight to power most of the earth, but also had access to about 600 years of brown coal. It seems they chose the latter option. Solar was expensive to install. Coal was cheap.

The more I looked around, the more waste I could see, and I started to remember my time working in information technology. I remembered leaving my pc on every night – as everyone did. All the faxes and printers were on too. All burning coal, and no one was even there!

I started to look at the office buildings with all their lights on at night. Who could be possibly there at 2.00 am? The shopping streets were lit up like the aurora borealis, all so consumers could browse in the shops when they were closed! Street lighting, cafe's bars, nightclubs, cinemas, there was no escaping it. I even noticed that my flatmates had left the music equipment, tv, and dvd player on standby – all using electricity whilst everyone was asleep! I would hate to be the man who was on shift that evening, digging coal to be burnt for no purpose.

But then most of what we do is frivolous. We don't give a damn. It's me, me, me. Maybe no one has told you about all this before, maybe you are in the dark like I was. Well, now you're not! If you continue to overuse resources they *will* run out. Use your huge human brain.

If you run a business, turn off all the electricity when you leave at night. Doesn't it make sense? You will be doing us all a favour (and saving money on your electricity bill). In the home, turn off pc's at the wall. Don't leave things on standby. Don't light up the house like a christmas tree. Find out about energy efficiency, have your home insulated to keep the heat in. Install better windows. Find out for yourselves.

Imagine having no electric bills, or having free hot water (probably lukewarm in the northern hemisphere, especially in winter).

Run solar, then by all means use, use, use. There may be times when you don't generate enough but that will help you to understand that you can't always have what you want when you want it, an idea that is foreign to all of us in the western world. Maybe by running out a few times you will learn you don't always have to have tv or computer on all the time. Maybe for once you could start a conversation, you don't need electricity for those.

Try solar, there's plenty of fire from the sun, and the great thing about it is no one has to get dirty digging for solar power. There's another load off your mind.

Air

1. *A mixture of gases (especially oxygen) required for breathing; the stuff that the wind consists of*
2. *[archaic] Once thought to be one of four elements composing the universe (empedocles)*

Right now I am breathing, and I hope you are too! We don't have to think about it, it happens automatically; in out, in out. You can't see the air we breathe, it's invisible, yet it really is there. Planes fly in air without falling out the sky, and so do birds, it really is a magical substance.

Air constitutes 78 percent nitrogen, and 21 percent oxygen and 1 percent of other substances. Without water you would die of thirst, without fire from the sun you would die from cold and starvation, but without air you would die of suffocation (all unpleasant deaths I assure you).

I love to go running, I go as often as I can. It clears the mind, and strengthens the body, but I can't stand running in cities. When you go running you need to breathe pure oxygen, nothing else will do. Unfortunately, cities aren't like that. First there's the smell of traffic. You know that can't be good for you. The fumes makes you choke, and then somebody will walk past you smoking a cigarette, and you can almost taste the poison.

Next there's the smell of food cooking. Normally none of this bothers me too much, but being able to run requires a deep steady flow of oxygen to the lungs. Anything else is rejected. For me that's pretty good indication of what should be going into the air.

Imagine the factories spewing up noxious fumes into the atmosphere, polluting the air we breathe. It should be noted that this doesn't happen as much in the UK anymore, because most manufacturing has been moved offshore, to countries like India and China, which, along with the USA have become mega-polluters.

For some reason, because we can't see the air, we don't think that polluting it matters. It's only air after all, what good is it to us? We can't sell it. And as long as people keep demanding more and more stuff, we will continue to pollute. The general public demanded it, so how can we let them down? How can we let the world down?

Since the dawn of industrialisation, our cities have been covered in blankets of pollution, but it was all in the name of progress; progress that has made a few men rich, that is all. The legacy that has been left to us is pollution. It is interesting to note that nature leaves no trace when going about its complex work – everything is left in balance. We, on the other hand, have only been able to progress through the manufacture of machines.

To understand this better; next time you are by the ocean watch for a sailing boat on the water, powered effortlessly by the wind, silent and graceful. Compare that to the modern jet ski or speedboat which grates noisily through the water – its machine parts working at full speed. The sound is strange, it doesn't fit with the serene beauty of the ocean; like all man-made machines, their sound is artificial, metallic and not in harmony with nature. The sound of a car vs. a bicycle, the sound of a glider vs. a jet plane. There is just something about these man-made sounds which upsets us internally, which make us stressed.

Imagine all the cars in the city were powered by pedal power! How would the noise change? How would you feel? The wind (*air moving (sometimes with considerable force) from an area of high pressure to an area of low pressure*) can be very noisy, yet even the full force of a gale does not disturb in the same way as man-made noise, perhaps the tone is in balance with ourselves? Do you notice that it even feels strangely calming to be in bed when a gale is blowing?

I feel much the same way when standing by the sea during a storm. The wind is strong and the waves are crashing onto the shore, which is an altogether more noisy experience than standing by a building site, but which one is quieter? Which scene would calm you inside? Which scene would exhilarate you? The building site with its angle grinders, cranes, and hammers, or nature – angry and fierce? I know which one I would choose.

The power of the wind is incredible; it can flatten whole towns, so it seems only natural to want to harness some of that power. Using nature to power man-made machines is nothing new. Windmills have been around for several hundred years powering mills so it makes sense to use the wind to create power.

The new technology is called a wind turbine (*rotary engine in which the kinetic energy of a moving fluid is converted into mechanical energy by causing a bladed rotor to rotate*). Some say they are beautiful, others think they are a blot on the landscape, but whatever your view, they generate electricity. They just require two things, lots of wind and plenty of space, so they are pretty impractical if you want to have one in a city on your apartment building, but many generating companies have set up wind farms in isolated windy spots, and then carry the power through the grid (*a system of high tension cables by which electrical power is distributed throughout a region*).

Good or bad does not really apply here. It is renewable sustainable energy and has to be a positive step away from fossil fuels, gas, and nuclear, although we will never be able to generate enough electricity for us to keep consuming at the current rate – unless you want the whole country covered in windmills. The way forward is to re-think?

Wind power is so new that negative aspects haven't been fully considered yet, but time will tell.

Man will always have an impact on the earth, as he is never satisfied, always exploring, always inventing, and inevitably, it is the earth and our fellow inhabitants who must pay the price. So next time you get in your car, or spew pollution from your factory, remember, you aren't the only one who needs to breathe the air on the planet.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Earth

1. *The solid part of the earth's surface*

2. *[archaic] Once thought to be one of four elements composing the universe (empedocles)*

The final part of the ancient four elements. The land we stand on. Terra firma. This is where we live. This is where we are born and where we die. This is where we love. This is where we hate and kill. This is where we are greedy and selfish. This is where we give birth. This is where we eat.

As we are not likely to grow gills and survive in the oceans any time soon, don't you think we had better start looking after this area. When you think about it, if you remove the oceans and the polar regions from the map, the available space we have for living is pretty small.

Wherever we live, whatever we do, whatever religion we are, we all want a piece of it! Just a small bit of land to call our own. Kings and rulers have been going to war for thousands of years just to get a bit more. You see, they all want what's in it. Not only is "owning" land a status symbol, there's also gold, minerals, and oil buried underneath it. If it's arable, crops can be grown on the surface, or if there are trees, they can be cut down for paper and wood.

For some people, the earth is just a means of making more money. They don't care what happens to the animals, insects or birds, they just want the money. Money to make themselves more important, to buy more influence with.

I wish I could say that this kind of attitude to life makes me angry, but it just makes me sad. Sad for the earth that is being exploited, and sad for the man who believes that making money is more important than being a custodian of the land for future generations of humans and animals.

A custodian sees a tree as something that brings life to the planet, that supports communities of birds and insects, whereas an exploiter just sees it as a commodity. I don't know about you, but to me, this seems terribly short sighted. We are on the earth for a maximum of one hundred years, then we die. Does it not seem important to you to look after something that has been around for four billion years? Can you understand that figure? 4,000,000,000! Four billion years versus our ludicrously short one hundred years (normally it's shorter).

Why are we deluding ourselves as to our own importance, when we can only live for a hundred years! What a joke we are; so full of self-confidence, so arrogant, so emotionally weak that we have to conquer everything and everyone in our path.

The more I consider the human being, the more I am convinced that he, unlike any other animal on this planet, is the odd one out. Needing assistance from the moment he is born, the human is not like the wild foal I watched being born last week, as it fell from its mother to the ground, and forty five minutes later – although shaky – was on its feet. No, humans are dependent on their mothers and fathers for protection for many years.

We do not instinctively know how to hunt for food; we do not even know what food it is we need! We have no fur to keep us warm; we are not strong enough to kill an animal with our bare hands; we have had to invent knives and forks to eat, and discover fire to cook with. We have had to invent clothes and shoes. We just don't seem to fit in. We are violent, we kill our own species for no reason. We seem so different from every other living thing on this earth, are we even sure we belong here?

Maybe we're on the wrong planet! Maybe we *did* originate somewhere else. Maybe we were made by a creator who wanted to make us "special." Maybe we are an alien race trying to fit in. Maybe we didn't come from the apes after all.

I think this can be the only reason we are so ignorant of our surroundings. All other species interact with the earth in harmony. They all have tasks to do, and do them well. We on the other hand destroy as much of nature as we can and kill each other as much as we can and kill as many other species as we can! We truly are unique, although the label of "most intelligent species on the planet" is looking pretty shaky now.

"Ahh, but the reason the animals work in harmony with nature is because they don't know any better" says you.

"That must be the reason we are intent on destroying everything, because we don't know any better," says me.

The alien theorists are right, I have to hand it to you guys. There is no way that homo sapiens originated on this planet. I have studied the evidence, and found no common link between us and this planet. All the

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

other species have contributed to creating a harmonious world except us. Maybe we are all part of an experiment. Maybe to be human is just a test to see what we would do given limited intelligence, maximum ignorance and zero compassion?

Maybe we'll succeed in the next life, maybe we'll succeed on the next planet, or maybe we'll just go extinct. I'm sure there's an animal sweepstake out there betting on how long we'll last. Or maybe they're betting how long they'll last with us in charge.

For many years the four elements were thought to make up the physical universe. Now we have “disproved” the theory, but nonetheless these four elements, water, fire, air and earth make up the physical world as we know it. They are all equally important in our life, and the life of the planet as a whole. Science may have created new theories about the universe, but without these four elements this world would not exist. These elements are still used in chinese and indian ayurvedic medicine, both widely respected throughout the world.

Let us tread carefully. Let us develop compassion, and be kind to the earth, to the air, to the fire, to the water, and all other living creatures, who are our fellow inhabitants. Let us show we *do* belong here.

[Back to Index](#)

World

1. *Everything that exists anywhere*
2. *All of your experiences that determine how things appear to you*
3. *People in general; especially a distinctive group of people with some shared interest*
4. *The 3rd planet from the sun; the planet we live on*
5. *The concerns of this life as distinguished from heaven and the afterlife*

As I was looking up at the millions of stars in the sky the other night, I unfortunately pondered the age old question, “I wonder where we are?” It may seem a strange question, but this is one which all of us want to know the answer to.

We all know we live on earth (the name we have given this spinning mass), but where are we?

Scientists have shown we are the third planet from the sun, and we are surrounded by galaxies, stars, and planets. For many years it was believed that the earth was flat, but it was then proved to be round. That means that if we live in the northern hemisphere, the people in the southern hemisphere live below us, or do they live above us? As space is potentially infinite we cannot say with any authority if there is an end, and we do not know which way is left, right, top or bottom. All we can say is that the earth moves around the sun and spins on an imaginary axis held in place by gravity, and as that is the limit of my knowledge, I will not try to impress you further with my science!

So for now, we will all just have to accept that we are in something called “space” (because that's what it is, a space), and we are not able to put a physical location it. This has troubled the greatest minds who have ever lived (including some of yours I imagine), because we cannot understand the concept of space. If it was created in a big bang, surely it had to be in a physical place? How could something be created out of nothing? If there was nothing before, what or who created something?

Needless to say, there are many people dedicating their lives to finding out more about our extraordinary planet, the space that surrounds us, and the origins of life; but for now, I would like to talk to you about something all together less scientific.

When I looked up at the stars the other night, I suddenly began to feel very small. The world I knew seemed, well, insignificant. I started to think about my life honestly, and what I had done, about what I used to believe was important and I came up with a short list.

1. Having fun
2. Going on holiday
3. Having nice things
4. Earning lots of money
5. Having attractive girlfriends

Shallow? Unthinking? Maybe, but for my age group and peer group these were what was important at the time. Can you come up with a short list of what you used to believe to be important in your life? Do it now if you can. I noticed that the things that were important to me were just enjoyment and acquisition of possessions. How many of you have similar things in your lists? I then wrote a new list of what is important to me now and compared it to the old one. I was astounded by the change.

1. To make a positive difference to the earth, and its inhabitants
2. To learn more about myself
3. To learn more about the world, and the universe
4. To help people understand

When I finished writing, I realised that somewhere along the line, I had recognised that there was a lot more to life than just my pleasure. Write a new list for yourself and see if anything has changed recently.

**

Every day on the news, we see video from some poor country around the globe. Great famines, floods, wars, corruption, or murders, and we think “that's just terrible,” and may send a few pounds to a disaster relief campaign, or just shake our heads at “the state of the world;” but then we turn over to a nice sitcom, have a coffee, and carry on with our own lives.

“It's a shame,” you say, “but what can I do?”

We see it as something so far removed from our own lives, that although we are sorry it happened, we are glad it doesn't affect us. So, we *are* interested, but only as voyeurs, not as people deeply concerned for the rest of our fellow humans on this small planet.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

When I think of the stars I watched the other night, and look at the images of earth from outer space, I realise it is only by looking at something bigger than your pleasure, your house, your street, your town, your city, your county, or your country, that you can really start to appreciate what the world is.

The magic, this amazing planet, the life, the beauty, the possibilities

Now think of the other planets you see pictures of – the mass of swirling gases, the grey rock, the planets with no life on them, the freezing and boiling temperatures, storms covering the entire planets... uninhabitable... empty. Now think of the picture of earth again. The blue of the oceans, the greens of the fields, the browns of the deserts, the white of the clouds, and tell me where we live isn't the most perfect place in the entire galaxy!

Some people obviously don't think that the world is perfect, because they constantly want to destroy it, through wars, pollution, and the constant mining of resources. Perhaps some people haven't looked up at the stars recently, perhaps they haven't talked to the scientists, because if they did, they would realise we've got nowhere else to go.

Let's face it, there isn't anywhere like the earth that we know, and if we found somewhere, there would be *no way* to get six billion people there. Maybe the global leaders have found a new planet, but you can be sure there'd be no room for us on the plane!

It's interesting to note that the same leaders who have developed and produced nuclear weapons which have the power to destroy everybody, and everything on this planet, have also developed nice nuclear fallout bunkers, where they can live out the rest of their days happily, whilst everyone else is dead, or sick from radiation poisoning. Still, at least they killed *their* enemy.

So the next time you get a chance, look at a picture of earth on the internet, or in the library, and take time to just stand and stare at the stars one night, and just imagine how envious someone looking at the earth may feel. Everything in the world is perfect. The atmosphere is perfect. The oxygen is perfect. The animals, birds, and indeed all living creatures that share this planet are perfect. As humans we are perfect.

The only imperfection is our thinking

I can't understand what happened to us. We stand today as the most intelligent species on the planet, but after several million years of evolution, we still can't seem to get it right. Instead of using our massive brain capacity for the good of the planet and the benefit of our fellow inhabitants, we use it for greed, for power, for destruction, and for violence.

In fact, we are no better than we were a million years ago. We are still fighting over territory, women, food and water in much the same way we were when we started the long process of evolving all that time ago. Maybe we don't appreciate what we've got here on earth; maybe because we are only here for a short time we don't care; or maybe it will take another million years of evolution to get our thinking straight. Maybe the future inhabitants of earth will look back on this period in much the same way as we have at the cavemen – as savages; As humans only in name.

Perhaps we will be considered savage in our treatment of each other, our mistreatment of the animals, and the planet we live on. Perhaps the future inhabitants of earth will think themselves lucky that the planet wasn't destroyed, or maybe there won't be a planet left for them.

Maybe we will have destroyed it, either by war, recklessness or greed. Imagine that, our great earth lying dead. A giant mass spinning in space with the oceans destroyed, the atmosphere so hostile no life can exist; life as we know it, wiped out, extinct. For what? Because one man wants to get rich so he cuts down a rainforest, or because we can't walk anywhere, so we take the car, or because one man hates another because of his nationality, or doesn't agree with another's belief?

Imagine yourself as the visitor from another planet again now. Imagine sitting in your spacecraft above the earth, watching how we act, seeing what we care about, observing how we think. What would your opinion of us be? An advanced civilisation? Your forefathers made a report on the earth five thousand years ago. How has it changed?

Civilisation

1. *A society in an advanced state of social development (e.g. with complex legal and political and religious organizations)*

Report on earth 2006

Still fighting over religion and existence of god.
Still fighting over land.
Still hostile to other groups from other areas of the planet.
Still as violent as ever.

New:

Have invented transportation that is causing massive pollution.
Are using up resources at an extraordinary rate.
Have invented paper money – power and greed on a global scale.
Although food and water abundant, many millions starving to death.

Report conclusion: Do not visit for another 5000 years

We may have advanced in many ways in the last 5000 years, but what hasn't changed is our thinking. We may call ourselves civilised, with all our culture, and technology, such as opera, ballet, art, poetry, global agriculture, planes, skyscrapers and computer games. But we still haven't learned to show empathy, kindness and respect to each other; let alone care for the animals and the planet.

Look up at the stars tonight, and remember, that although we don't know precisely where we are in the universe, how the universe was created, or if we are indeed alone in space; there are six billion people here, plus all the billions of animals, birds, fish, insects, and reptiles to keep us company. We need to take care of them first. Starting right now.

Take your list of what you believe is important and see if the earth is on there. It didn't use to be on mine, but it is now.

[Back to Index](#)

Worship

1. *The activity of worshipping*
2. *A feeling of profound love and admiration*
3. *Love unquestioningly and uncritically or to excess; venerate as an idol*
 4. *how devotion to (a deity)*
 5. *Attend religious services*

This topic is going to be a hard one for me to write because I don't think I worship anything! I don't go to church, or a mosque; I don't go belong to a religious institution; I don't have images of christ or vishnu on my walls; I have no statue of the buddha, and I have no altar, but that's ok, because you probably do. So maybe you can help me understand why you worship a painting or a statue?

You say it is not the image that is important – because you know it is just a bronze statue or a painting made by Man, but what is behind the image – the unimaginable, the powerful, the almighty, the unquestionable.

I shouldn't be surprised that people worship things. Since the dawn of Man, he has been afraid. He was afraid of the sun's power, so he worshipped it. He was afraid of the stars, so he worshipped them, etc. And why wouldn't he be afraid? Born into emptiness, with no knowledge of nature and the universe, he had no scientific evidence to show him he shouldn't be afraid.

He saw the devastation that sun, wind and rain could do. Great floods, great droughts, great ice ages – he had reason to be afraid. He was out of his depth here, and he didn't know how to control nature. So rather than trying to understand it, he supplicated himself in front of it. He made animal and human sacrifices to appease the “gods,” who were in fact, just nature at work, without design, without malice, without thought – but Man wasn't to know that!

He thought he had offended the gods, so they brought great storms upon him, and he offered the only thing he had – no, not himself – other people! And if this didn't appease them, he sacrificed more people and more animals. How was he to know that if he just waited, the storms would calm down!

Man has always been afraid of the unknown, and as the obsession with science has proved, it is his desperate desire to be free of the unknown that has driven him to explore the universe and all things in it. To explain the unexplainable.

But even now, when we know so much about the universe scientifically, it's not enough for Man. In the past he had no way to explain the messages the prophets brought about gods wrath, and the ending of the world etc. So just in case the messages were true, he decides to keep worshipping, just in case god gets angry. Thankfully, in most countries, human sacrifices have stopped as governments became jumpy about their citizens being murdered (even if it was in a good cause), although animals are still regularly slaughtered for this purpose.

So why is man still afraid of the wrath of the gods? Well, because he can't see god, and he can't explain everything, and rather than accepting that we are all part of the universe, and understanding that worshipping is keeping us in a state of fear, rather than releasing us from it, we put up our altars, we place images on them and say: “worship or be damned!”

For such a supposedly intelligent species, it makes me uneasy to think we are praying to what is little more than someone's interpretation of what this god looks like (whichever religion you support). Whether you worship allah, jesus christ or buddha (amongst others), it makes no difference. You are prostrating yourself in front of no more than a nice painting. Wouldn't you agree?

*How dare you insult our religion!
You will be damned, unbeliever!
You will spend all of eternity in hell!*

So ok, some of you may now have thoughts racing round in your head about the nerve of this man who is no one, insulting us, and the god we worship. But can I ask you one question before you hang me from my neck until dead? Why do you worship something which you cannot see? What purpose does it serve? Will you be given eternal life? Will you be offered a lifetime of wine and virgins to serve you? Or will it just be a beautiful place where you can float about looking angelic? If these places do exist, then why do you need to bother praying and worshipping to get in? Surely if god is the most powerful being in the universe, then he left space for everyone, not just those who say their prayers every day. Do you understand what I am trying to convey to you?

I do not want to offend the delicate thoughts in your mind, but if your parents and your teachers had not shown you how to pray, or taken you to the synagogue or the temple, would you go anyway and worship a statue? Of course you wouldn't. If I showed you a bronze sculpture of myself, would you worship me? If

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

your mother had a painting made of herself, would you sit in front of it every day, praying to be saved from eternal damnation? No, unless she made you do it from a young age, and told you you would endure terrible suffering in the next life if you didn't.

You see, at the heart of it, we are terribly impressionable people, in that things make an impression on our mind, and if that impression is strong enough, and made at the right time, it stays with us forever.

I don't care if I go to hell. I don't care if I suffer the wrath of the gods, so why should you? Why not lead a compassionate and loving life here on earth, and let that be the end of it? If there is a day of judgement we will face it then, but if we have lived in service to others and loved our brothers and sisters like our own, then I'm sure even the most intolerant god would see fit to give you a pass, maybe even with distinction.

Remember, the most violent men on the planet worship god, but that is all show. They have been told that they should, or think that people will respect them because of it, but their lives reflect none of it. Kings and presidents have slain millions around the world in god's name. If I were god, I'd be saying: "Now wait a minute... I didn't agree to this..."

Let us pray

From an early age, our parents and religious leaders have forced us into prayer.

"Remember to say your prayers every night before you go to bed."

And it all seems fairly innocuous. "What harm can it possibly do?" the parents ask. But you are being conditioned, you are having the image of god imprinted on your brain, you are being brainwashed.

Did you ever choose to pray, or go to church? Perhaps, when you needed support, but generally, worshipping god starts at a young age, adults make sure of it, and anyone who doesn't go is an unbeliever, a follower of satan, a moral bankrupt, and other pointless terms used to describe someone who doesn't conform. But god doesn't want you to do this. God didn't come and ask you to do this. God, who cannot be described, did not threaten you, or make you afraid – Man himself did that.

Some people say that the act of worship makes them closer to god, but how do you know, have you investigated it for yourselves? You may feel better when worshipping, but it is fear that causes that. You feel fear, so you turn yourself over to a higher power because the books (written by Man) tell you you will be safe.

I can hear the rage building in you now.

"How dare he! How dare he!" but listen to yourselves, to your own mind. Why is it annoyed I have said these words? Is it because it is now conflicting with everything you believe in – with everything you are? Good, that's promising! But let's move away from religious worship for a moment to see if we can shine a light on this from a different angle.

Worshipping celebrities is a new phenomenon, although the practice of worship is not. We hang the images high above us on our walls, and we gaze longingly at them. I say celebrities, but what I am talking about is well known people.

My girlfriend's mother has two huge posters on the lounge wall, one of Che Guevara (*an Argentine revolutionary leader who was Fidel Castro's chief lieutenant in the Cuban revolution; active in other Latin American countries; was captured and executed by the Bolivian army (1928-1967)*), who for some reason, became an icon, even though he was, in essence, just a soldier, and Marilyn Monroe (*United States film actress noted for sex appeal (1926-1962)*)

Now, whilst she cannot be said to be actively worshipping these icons, why does she have them hanging on her wall? She doesn't have huge poster size pictures of her neighbour down the road on the wall! This can only be part of the human need to look up to someone greater than himself. A parent is never enough. This person must be beyond reproach, or as we said earlier, above questioning.

Pop stars and "heroes" of the screen can be seen on children's walls, and whilst they physically replace the religious icons, they do not replace the idea of being in awe (*an overwhelming feeling of wonder or admiration*) of someone they can never get close to, that they could only ever dream of meeting, because they are so wonderful.

Are they so wonderful in real life? I'm not so sure, but it is the idea that makes people worship them,

not the reality.

So on our little journey around the topic of worship, we can see that man has worshipped the sun, the moon and the stars, gods of the sea, and gods of love, through to the “one true god,” and finally, the gods of music, and the screen. Maybe it is just in our nature to worship beings we could never hope to be like, or things we are afraid of, or maybe I'm making a big mistake and am going to pay for it in the next life. But I won't be worshipping anything in the near future. An image can never be greater than all that we are. It is but an image.

I am a member of one species of planet earth – alive, vibrant, seeking truth. I am part of the universe and the universe is part of me. I am. I am indivisible.

Who am I? Just another ordinary human being. Not worthy of worship, but then again, why would you worship me? Then again, why would you worship anybody? You are great. Powerful. Creative. You are universal, but at the same time individual. You are perfect. Everything is in order.

[Back to Index](#)

X

Y

Youth

1. *A young person (especially a young man or boy)*

As we reach the age of puberty (*the time of life when sex glands become functional*) something starts happening to the sweet little child the parents have known for the last twelve or thirteen years. Suddenly they find themselves living with a teenager! I have no children of my own, but I was a teenager, and I know what I was like...

Before I started writing this topic, I became concerned I wouldn't remember what teenage life was like as I am now 38, but fortunately, I have my girlfriend's 15 year old sister to observe, and the funny thing is, it seems teenagers haven't improved!

“But mum, why do I have to get up?”

“Because it's one o'clock in the afternoon!”

“Leave me alone, I'm tired”

“Get up you lazy *****”

“***** off”

The conversations that my girlfriend's sister has with her mum seem like a mirror image of the one's I had with my own mum twenty years ago. “No I won't come with you.” No, I won't tidy my room.” “No I won't help with the washing up.” “I need some money.” “I want to go out with my *friends*!” “You don't understand me!” And indeed, most parents can't understand their teenagers behaviour. It suddenly seems as if their beautiful child has been replaced by an evil alien from another planet.

“How could the child I brought up to be respectful, and thoughtful, be behaving like this? He must be taking drugs, there is no other explanation for it!”

Mum: I need to talk to you about your behaviour. Are you taking drugs?

Teenager: What?

Mum: I asked you a question!

Teenager: No, I'm *not* taking drugs!

Mum: Where are you getting the money for the drugs? Are you stealing from us?

Teenager: I told you, I'm not taking drugs, now get out of my room and leave me alone.

Mum: Well, where do you go every night? You didn't come home for two nights last week. Who are these people you are hanging round with? Are they taking drugs? Are they the ones giving them to you?

Teenager: God, I hate you, why can't you just fuck off and leave me alone. (slamming door)

Mum: (To herself) I knew he was on drugs, I must get him some help.

In how many homes do scenarios like this take place? A few, some, all? Well, the mum may not be talking about drugs, but I'm sure there is something they disapprove of their “child” doing. In other words, the parent is thinking: “why can't you be more like us.”

Just because they don't go to rock concerts and don't wear the latest up to the minute fashion, don't have an mp3 player permanently attached to one ear, and a mobile phone attached to the other, they think their child shouldn't either.

It's not that they want to restrict their child, it's just that they compare their own childhood (in which they behaved perfectly of course) with their own child's, and come to the (usually wrong) conclusion that their teenager is heading down the wrong path, will make a mess of their life, and won't achieve anything. But then, suddenly, the teenager is 18; the magic number! The government calls them an adult, and off they go to university or work.

Suddenly those few years of hell seem like a dream. Of course, most teenagers become well adjusted (even boring) adults. They were going through a phase, and it's now over.

Let me go mum

When we talk about the teenage years, we are not talking about a specific age, but specific things that are happening in the teenagers body, namely, they are reaching sexual maturity – the ability of the human to procreate, to start a family of their own.

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

Unfortunately, society has decided (sorry, the powerful in government have decided) to fight nature, and say that actually, no, you are not old enough to have children, you are not old enough to hunt and bring in food, and no, you are not old enough to live on your own. You must wait until you are at least 18. Until then you must do what your parents tell you!

We already have the longest childhood of any species on the planet, where a parent is legally responsible for a child for a minimum of 16 to 18 years, and we are kept tightly under control (for our own good, you understand?). When we reach puberty, we are ready to break free – at least biologically. We are ready to go out into the world and find a mate, and we are constantly tugging at the leash. But our parents know that if we went out into the modern urban world at 14, we wouldn't survive, although only 60 years ago, most of my mum's family had to leave school at 14 and go out to work, with one uncle even lying about his age to get into the merchant navy.

They (parents and those in power) say we are not mature enough, yet nature does. They say we will not survive out there as it is a dangerous world, but it is also dangerous when you are 18 too. So what's it really to do with? Well, there are two things.

First those who control society want you to study and pass exams so you can get a good job and start paying your taxes. Second, parents and teachers fear that if you go out into the world at 13, you will not be psychologically mature (although you will be physically mature) enough to deal with life, will possibly be exploited by others, and if you are a female, probably made pregnant, where you would end up on the street, with no way to feed and clothe yourself or the baby. So all in all, it's best to stay at home, do what your told, and wait until you are psychologically mature enough to deal with life!

It's not like it used be, I remember in my day...

We are not biologically equipped to deal with this modern world we have created. Nature didn't count on us building desolate concrete cities. Perhaps nature still imagines that we will be living in the forest, or somewhere like that, where we will hunt, and gather berries, clothe ourselves in animal skins or something similar, and bring our children up in small tribes. That is, of course, not how we have organised our society these days.

We are getting further and further away from what we are biologically equipped for. But there's no point in fighting it. This is the society we have created and we must live in it. Thanks to modern society becoming so dangerous, and parents being so loving, I'd say that teenagers have never had it so good. In your grandfather's day, you'd have been forced to leave school and get a job. You'd have had to look after yourself, and the family you would create.

No, life's pretty good these days. Teenagers get to hang around trying to look “cool,” talking a load of rubbish, drinking, smoking, taking drugs, having sex, and still they get looked after! They get their meals cooked for them, their clothes washed, they get shelter, food, water, some even get money.

Hey, what are you complaining about? Life as a teenager is great. You may have the biological urge to go off and have sex with anything with a pulse, and yes, your parents may not “understand” you, but it's a darn sight better than having to go out to work every day, pay for your rent and your food, and support a family, in addition to the fact that you are not seemingly psychologically ready for the urban lifestyle. So if I were you, I'd keep my mouth shut about how bad you've got it, you've got a pretty sweet deal!

In some countries, children are sent out to work as soon as they are able to, and they get none of the benefits of the western lifestyle. They send children and teenagers out to work in sweat shops that provide us with cheap clothes, and some even are forcibly conscripted into the army in some parts of the world! Imagine what that life must be like as a teenager in places where you are forced out to work in a dangerous job? No hanging around the shopping malls looking cool, swapping ringtones on your bluetooth enabled phone. Just work. Work. WORK.

Are you the future?

Everyone says that the teenagers are the future. They say these are the people who will look after us in our

old age, so let's make sure they get the best possible chance, the best education, and the best support! We make them study, study, study, at a time when their internal clock is telling them "it's time to flee the nest and start procreating!"

"If you don't study, you will be a failure," we tell them.

"How will you get a good job?" We ask them. Because of course that's what it's all about, getting a good job. So they reluctantly study when they would rather be out practising their newly developed social skills. Do you see?

Forcing teenagers to study goes against all of their natural instincts, but as adults, who live in this competitive urban environment, we see at first hand what happens when you don't study – you are forced into a dead end manual job, with long hours, and little pay – and as we brought you into the world we are going to make damn sure it doesn't happen to you! So we say study, study, study. And the teenagers who cannot yet see the monstrous society we have created say: "Why? I just want to go out with my friends tonight."

But we want them to fill their heads with knowledge to pass exams. We want them to conform – not because we want to control them – but because we know they will be miserable in later life if they don't put the effort in now. But this is not the time to be filling teenager's heads with knowledge. They are not interested in doing what someone else tells them to do, they are doing what any self respecting homo sapiens should be doing, and that is exploring life! And explore life they do, whether it be sexually or socially.

We must remember that Man is a sexual social animal, so to deny it is more dangerous than permitting it. Teenagers must explore their own bodies, and each other's bodies. They must mingle with different social groups to find out where they feel most comfortable, but we say: "No! You *will not* go out with these people. You *will not* have sex before you are 18" and the teenager rightly says: "Up yours, I'm going to do it anyway." So we must not let our children stop exploring life. They will make mistakes and they will learn from them.

They are capable of great things these young people. But to deny them their freedom of expression just because you don't like it, is idiotic! It doesn't matter if they are "making a fool of themselves," or "they are making a big mistake," it is their life. They are the future, but only because they will live longer than we will (perhaps).

As parents, or as educators, you have to learn that this is an important time for teenagers. Because it is *their* time. It is not a time to be enforcing rules and regulations, but helping them to explore life to its fullest extent. You may think that because you have experience of life that you have the answers, but nobody has all the answers that these teenagers are seeking, because they are looking at life through fresh eyes, which hopefully have not been conditioned too much already.

I didn't study hard at school. I didn't go to university. I didn't even finish school properly, now I come to think of it. I did nothing my parents told me, in fact, I did the opposite. I got drunk, slept around with women, got up late, and did little work; but did it affect me as an adult? I mean really affect me? Of course not. It was all part of growing up, of tugging on the leash; until one day it broke, and I was free to make as many great discoveries, or mistakes as I wanted to. By then though no one cared. I was over 18. I was an adult.

University and beyond

I'm not surprised teenagers are tired and irritable while they are growing up. They are having to deal with some serious chemicals in their bloodstream (no, I'm not talking about taking drugs). I'm talking about hormones. Boys are discovering the power of testosterone, and girls are discovering the wonders their monthly cycle (*the monthly discharge of blood from the uterus of non-pregnant women from puberty to menopause*) can do to their emotions. Crying, anger, you know the sort of thing. At the same time, they are forced to study, and fill their brains with mainly useless knowledge which will probably never come in handy in later life.

Eventually at the age of 18 you are finished. Your hormones have settled down, the government has told you you are an adult, and you can go and fight for your country, or drink beer. Unfortunately, in some countries, you have to wait until you are 21 so you can find out what you have been missing!

The Little Book Of Life – Alan Macmillan Orr

You can get a job, or if your grades are good enough you can apply to go to university (which is like school except you can drink beer, have sex and party without your parents being around, and it puts off having to get a job for another few years), oh, and sorry, learn a lot about a subject you are deeply interested in.

If you complete the three years or more of study, you will be able to get a much better job than if you left school at 18, or you can continue studying and maybe go into academic life.

At university you will get to use your mind more. You will explore, you will be creative, and it will be encouraged by your lecturers. They do not want you to just repeat what you have read. They want you to redefine it, investigate it, argue the case for it and against it and at the end of your course of study you will usually be asked to do a dissertation (*a treatise advancing a new point of view resulting from research; usually a requirement for an advanced academic degree*). If you pass, you will be awarded a degree, and sent off into the world much cleverer than you would have been if you hadn't gone to university. Then, unless you are carrying on in academic research you *will* have to get a job of some kind!

Now, I don't want to go into all the boring stuff about how important it is to choose the right company for your career. In fact, I don't want to go into jobs at all. I want you to think about university. I want you to remember the magic of discovery, of investigation, of being immersed in a subject you were passionate about, and now think about what life has in store for you in the future.

Is that the end of learning? Are you now just a conformist?

You may have been a revolutionary at university, and now you are going to be a corporate banker! Think about how you felt when you were with other students all embarking on an exciting new journey of discovery. The things you learned from each other, the things you discussed, the passion you displayed when arguing your case, and now think about your future. What will you do with that investigative spark, will you just let it die, and join everyone else in the rat race, getting up at 6.00 am, home at 8.00 pm?

“Nice day at the office, dear?”

“Terrible, I need a drink.”

Do you want to join in with the misery we have created for ourselves, or do you want to find out if there is something more, something wonderful? All this learning, all the pain of being told to go and study and do your homework, being told you can't go out, you can't have a boyfriend, or girlfriend. All the protection that was given to you, and suddenly it's all over, and you are tipped out into the madness of the modern world.

What was the point of all that learning? What was the point of all the trouble you put your parents through while you were growing up? Is there any point at all? I urge you to use your mind and go and explore the universe with it! Never stop questioning. That's what learning is all about, exploration, not passing exams or getting a job. That's just plain boring! No wonder teenagers hate it.

[Back to Index](#)

Z

Zoo

1. *The facility where wild animals are housed for exhibition*

Have you ever been to a zoo? I have, but not for many years. It's a place where you can see animals, birds, insects, reptiles, and fish at close hand, in a safe environment. I was amazed by the giraffes, the bears, the tarantulas, the monkeys, and seals. They had every type of creature imaginable.

Schools often make trips there so the children can see the animals. Most adults, let alone children, would never get the chance to see a parrot from south america, a bear from china, or a penguin from antarctica, so zoos are an important part of the education process.

Zoos started several hundred years ago with the explorers bringing back exotic species to their own countries. They studied them, labelled them, and put them on view for the public. Of course, the public were in awe of these magnificent creatures, and it gave the scientists a lot of prestige for discovering new species. Today, millions of people learn about creatures they have not seen before, and scientists breed animals in captivity who would otherwise go extinct. They also protect endangered species.

So is there anything wrong with zoos? They all seem to be doing a pretty good job – until you see it from the animal perspective.

I am not saying that these animals are not cared for or loved by the people who look after them, but recently, I started to think about the animals in the zoo in england I had seen, all thousands of miles away from their natural habitat. Elephants in concrete pens, tarantulas behind glass, parrots behind bars, and I wondered how free they would feel back in their home. I imagined the elephant running across the plains of africa with her herd, the spider creating her web and catching prey, and the parrot stretching her wings, and flying through the treetops. Then I thought back to the dull man-made environment we had created for them. For our pleasure, not theirs.

We say: "They're not unhappy, they like it here," but we can't know that. If I was used to being able to fly in the treetops, a cage would come a pretty poor second, don't you think? We say: "They haven't known anything else, they were born here," but animals belong in the wild. We say: "If they were in the wild, they would become extinct," but it isn't our job to save all animals from extinction – natural selection takes care of that complex task.

On first inspection, it would seem that we care deeply about the living world around us, but if we look more closely, we see that once again, it is our need to control our environment. We can't work with it, we don't understand it, so we capture it, lock it up, study it, and charge people to see it.

We have internet, we have books, we have tours, we have film. We have so many resources available to us if we wish to study nature in its own habitat, but we're too lazy, we prefer to have the entire natural world arranged for us in an exhibition that takes no longer than two hours to get round. Think about it. Are you that interested in nature that you would fly or cycle around the world to see it, even if you had enough money? I doubt it.

If it's easy we're interested. If someone else lays it all on for us, we'll go, but don't ask us to go to the amazon to study the bird in its natural habitat; (a) it's much too difficult (b) we'd probably want to open a new hotel there, and (c) as the dominant species on the planet, it is our right to do whatever we want!

But just imagine for a moment that we weren't the dominant species on the planet, and there was a species that was smarter and stronger than us, and wanted to collect us, study and exhibit us.

Imagine being stuck behind a glass cage, with something strange looking at you, all day, every day; or imagine being stuck behind bars so you couldn't run, or locked in a concrete pen every night away from your family and kind. Even if you were born there, even if they say you would become extinct out in the wild again, wouldn't you want to be free in your natural environment?

Pet Shop

1. A shop where pet animals can be purchased

For me personally, pet shops are similar to zoos, in that they have a voyeuristic quality to them.

How many times have you gone into a pet shop – as a child or an adult – to look at all the “cute” animals? We look at all the different kind of pets, which you remember are “*a domesticated animal kept for companionship or amusement*,” choose one, and hand over money. At this point we become the owner of the

pet. It is ours by law, and anyone who takes it from us can be prosecuted for theft.

Think about the word “owner.” We apply it to everything we possess, except the items we normally own are not alive and do not feel pain or distress. We always want to own things, to possess them. we want to accumulate “things” and animals become part of this desire. We want them and we shall have them! All we need to do is come up with £2.00 for a mouse, £8.00 for a guinea pig, £10.00 for a rabbit, £200.00 for a cat, or £300.00 for a dog. How much are you worth? £10.00? £200.00? £1,000? £100,000?

This discussion is not about money though, it's about how we humans place a monetary value on everything. Everything becomes for sale. It doesn't matter if it's a table, a tv, or a south american parrot. Everything is just a commodity to us. We just can't see the planet as a whole; we still cannot see animals, birds, spiders, and fish as being part of our world, in the same way we are part of theirs. We isolate ourselves from them, and isolate them from each other by keeping them in our homes.

We have domesticated some species to such an extent that they are now dependent on us for food and water, and in return, they keep us amused, until they do something wrong or we grow tired of them.

How many of you have owned a dog? I had a golden labrador. He was very amusing, but ate his way through most of my apartment, including shoes, clothes, furniture, and a good selection of electrical cables. I loved him to bits, but he was so uncontrollable; I didn't train him right and he used to run off whenever he felt like it, or eat food off the table. I used to hit him every time he did that, but he still kept wagging his tail. I used to get so angry when he didn't do as he was told, why couldn't he just listen to me?

The problem is, we blame the animal for behaving in an animal like way, when in actual fact we want them to be like us. We want them to know it is wrong to go to the toilet on the carpet (what's a carpet?) or eat food from the dinner table (what's a dinner table?). We want them to behave (behave?) and obey us (obey?).

You see dogs can't understand these concepts, but we still expect them to, and when they don't understand (as they are animals who don't speak our language), we get frustrated, and show this physically in the form of anger at the poor dog. If it becomes too much you can always give him away, or if he becomes a bit “aggressive” you can always “put him to sleep” (have him killed) as someone I know did.

Before I went travelling around the world I gave my labrador away as I couldn't take him with me. It was a good home, and he was probably well looked after, but I can't help thinking I treated him in the same way as I treated my sofa and tables and chairs. I just gave him away like I would any other possession, with no respect for the fact that he was a living creature, and that's the problem with keeping pets. They are just for our amusement. Not because we love nature. Not because we are deeply interested in dogs, cats, reptiles or birds; but just because we can have them and we have some money to buy them.

Whatever our reason for keeping animals out of their natural environment, whether it be scientific, because we want to protect them, or just look at them whether in a zoo or at home; if you have to keep something in a cage to stop it from running away, it probably doesn't want to be there.

Let's hope no future intelligent species decides to keep humans as pets otherwise we've got an unhappy future ahead of us, with a collar attached to a metal lead stuck in a cage, with one meal a day and a bowl of water with people looking at us all day. At least cats and dogs have come so far in domestication that we can leave them to run around freely; you couldn't do that with a human, he would keep trying to escape.

So next time you look into your bird cage, watch your fish swimming in the tank, admire your reptile, or visit the zoo, imagine the land where they came from, and imagine them back in the wild, free where they belong.

[Back to Index](#)

Closing Dialogue

And so it is done. I had planned to have some clever discussion with you about what you had discovered, but then it came to me that this book was my journey of discovery. Sure we had some discussions, I made plenty of sarcastic comments, and challenged, or should I say confronted you on many issues; but in the end, even if you don't end up reading this book because (a) no one will publish it or (b) you're not interested in what I am discussing it won't matter. The insight I have gained from writing this book has opened my mind to a world I didn't know existed.

As the reader, you may feel that in some instances I went too far, or maybe not even far enough. The words may have cut deep into your thinking or they may have washed over you as if I had never even written them. But none of that matters.

I can only thank with all my heart, the people who have shared their time, part of their life with me, and people I have met in the streets, or even just observed in passing, for they are the ones who have taught me; not clever books on psychology, philosophy and religion. In other people I have seen myself, and on many occasions I didn't like what I saw. But through silent watchfulness I started to understand. So this book is for all the people who loved me, married me, left me, hated me, worked with me, shouted at me, gave me a job, sacked me, drank with me, had sex with me, oh, and the people who bought me dinner and let me stay in their house whilst I was writing this.

I warmly invite anyone and everyone to write their own books that explore the nature of all things; you can even use my topic headings. And even if no one else reads them you will teach yourself more than you will ever learn from experience, classrooms and books.

I wish you all a peaceful and joyful life.

Thank you for sharing my journey with me

The beginning...

[Back to Index](#)